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"Rescuing Some Youthful Minds":

Benevolent Women and the Rise of the Orphan Asylum as Civic Household in Early Republic Natchez

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"Rescuing Some Youthful Minds":

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by

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Dedication

For my husband, Jonathan, and my parents, George and Dottie

Acknowledgments

In August 2005, I was just beginning my only year off from teaching to work on this dissertation when Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans. Though I was living in Beaumont, Texas, about four-hours to the west of the Crescent City by car, I was quickly swept up in the aftermath of that disaster. The thousands of New Orleanians who rushed to our area to escape the hurricane settled in for a long stay, and I found it impossible to concentrate on my dissertation. Frightful images of that beloved city under water and local reports of displaced persons in distress compelled me to stop my writing and head to the event center which had been converted into a shelter. There was something sublime about standing in a cinderblock hallway handing out towels and toiletry kits to families who had very likely lost their homes forever. Over the two weeks that I worked at the shelter, I found that other volunteers felt it a privilege to serve these strangers. We were all aware that if the hurricane had tilted just a few degrees in our direction, we might be the ones encamping in some distant city, standing in line for showers and wondering with dread about what, if anything, was left back home. We also seemed to share a sense of relief: wind and water had dealt their mighty blow for the season, so a similar natural disaster would not likely befall us.

Less than a month after Katrina hit New Orleans, the city of Beaumont was ordered to evacuate. This time the storm's name was Rita, and she promised to hit our corner of the Gulf Coast with a violence equal to that of the last hurricane.

The story of my own hurricane evacuation could consume as many pages as this dissertation, but to sum up, it involved a frantic journey on my own (my husband had

been away on a business trip and so flew to my parent's house in Ft. Worth separately). Two-thirds of my car was filled with research materials and library books; the remaining crannies were stuffed with my wedding dress, a few clothes and photos, and three cat carriers inhabited by three very unhappy felines. Twenty hours for a trip that normally took a little under five—driving in ditches, idling for hours on roads six deep in vehicles heading the same direction, watching a mini-van erupt into flames, ducking under my steering wheel as a fight among frustrated evacuees broke out on the hood of my car. There were moments when I truly wondered whether I would make it. And there were moments I reflected on the sheer irony of the past months. I had been working on the dissertation chapter entitled, "The Power of Sympathy," when Katrina struck. Sympathy led me to abandon it temporarily, and I had just returned to my writing when Hurricane Rita forced me to abandon it again.

In the two weeks my husband and I had to stay away from our battered community, and in the months we spent restoring our damaged home, I thought about the benevolent women who comprise the subject of my research. Part of their charitable impulse derived from a belief that all creatures are a breath away from misfortune and a sense that when a society helps needy individuals the whole community reaps the reward. Over the years, their voluntary work inspired similar ventures so that by the early twenty-first century a vast web of social networks was in place to mitigate the impact of tragedy.

From my initial encounter with the Natchez Female Charitable Society records to proofreading as house repairs were still being made, this dissertation has had quite a history. My deepest appreciation goes to all those who helped me along the way.

Generous funding from the History Department, the College of Liberal Arts, and the Graduate School at The University of Texas at Austin helped support my research and writing through most of this project. The staff at the University's Center for American History and the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center was always friendly and attentive, and Mike Widener of the Special Collections at the University's Tarlton Law Library assisted me with legal research. Wendy Nesmith and her assistants at Inter-Library Services deserve special thanks. I spent all six of my doctoral years living outside the city of Austin, but they kept me connected to the University's libraries and made sure that I received all the research materials I needed.

My research took me to various parts of the Lower Mississippi Valley, and I am grateful to the knowledgeable staff at the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library at Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana. The splendid new edifice housing the Mississippi Department of Archives and History in Jackson, Mississippi was a pleasure to work in, and the staff shared many stories about the state's early inhabitants. Above all, I treasure the many days I spent in Natchez, Mississippi over a period of several years. Mimi Miller at the Historic Natchez Foundation is an encyclopedia with a heart of gold, and her invitation to peruse court records that were not yet cataloged led me to discover many historical gems. Ron Miller was also very helpful and friendly during my trips, and I am grateful to the Foundation for inviting me to present a portion of this dissertation at the Historic Natchez Conference in February 2004. I appreciate the staff at the Adams County Chancery Court for never raising eyebrows as I kept asking for their oldest and dustiest records. All in all, it is a joy to conduct research in Natchez, and each time I

leave that fascinating town I cannot wait to return. My strongest link with that community remains the Natchez Children's Home Services, the descendant agency of the Female Charitable Society founded in 1816. Today, it is headed by the intrepid Nancy Hungerford, whom I affectionately call "Mrs. Tichenor" after one of the Society's most vocal founding members. Nancy and board member Kathie Blankenstein, whose family tree includes several of the Society's founders, were always generous with their time and stories, and I am grateful that they let me contribute a historical column to the Home's biannual newsletter. As any scholar can attest, research can be lonely business, but Nancy, Kathie, and their fellow Natchezians always made me feel at home.

Research alone does not a dissertation make. A number of scholars helped me bring this project to fruition. Many thanks to all those who gave me such beneficial feedback at conferences over the years. I am especially indebted to Emily Clark of Tulane University, who kindly sent me a chapter of her book, which was then in production. Conversations with Emily over the past few years have helped me crystallize this dissertation and plan for its expansion into a monograph. Among the faculty of the History Department at The University of Texas at Austin, I extend thanks to all those who helped shape me as an academic in seminars, conferences, and informal gatherings. I am indebted to Neil Kamil and Julie Hardwick, who were generous with their time and comments, and I am grateful to all those who participated in the Early Americanist Seminar led by Jim Sidbury.

Of course, I couldn't have made it without the help and support my fellow graduate students. Sara Fanning and Marian Barber were especially supportive as I

labored through this project and both were invaluable as critique partners. Marian graciously attended my defense, and I will always be grateful to her for serving as my Austin lifeline. Another fellow graduate student who helped me tremendously was also the department's Graduate Coordinator. Marilyn Lehman, who completed her M.A. in Comparative Literature while making sure I followed all the necessary regulations as a student, helped me more than I can say. Her benevolent hand guided me through a number of crises that emerged throughout my doctoral program.

The members of my dissertation committee merit special consideration for the kindness and solicitude they bestowed on a student who was never around the department very much. Bruce Hunt, who was also graduate advisor, helped me clear many administrative hurdles, and it was a pleasure to work with someone who shares my enthusiasm for Natchez's history. His careful editing of the final dissertation and the notes made by Beth Hedrick of the English Department opened my eyes to all the little blunders and inconsistencies I had missed. I spent many happy hours conversing with Beth, and there were times when her love of literature and literary criticism made me consider "crossing the lines" for her disciplinary camp. Without Carolyn Eastman, I would not have been able to appreciate the importance of gender in early republic voluntary activity. Her questions and comments have surely honed my analytical abilities. Michael Stoff, whom I had as an undergraduate, has many claims to my gratitude. Suffice it to say, I can trace my desire to be a professional scholar to the impression he made on me many years ago, and his passion for excellence in writing has shaped the way I think about narrative and the historian's craft. The same is true of Bob

Abzug. To him I owe much, and the guidance he gave me—first as mentor, then as dissertation supervisor—helped me achieve my lifelong goal of completing a doctoral degree. I do not exaggerate when I say that could not have made it without him.

It is customary to thank family last of all, and copious thanks are certainly owed to mine. I am grateful to my parents-in-law, Jim and Judy Brush, who housed me for many nights while I completed my doctoral coursework. My own parents, George and Dottie Zey, have been unfailingly supportive of my academic career, and their high regard for education inspired my own love of learning. Everyone should be so lucky to have such parents. I am also deeply fortunate for having Jonathan Brush as a husband. We first met as undergraduates and then met again when I was applying for graduate school. Over the past six years, he has buoyed my spirits through seminars, read many drafts of chapters, and enriched my life in countless ways. To my parents and to my husband this dissertation is lovingly dedicated.

"Rescuing Some Youthful Minds":

Benevolent Women and the Rise of the Orphan Asylum as Civic Household

in Early Republic Natchez

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In 1816 a group of white, affluent women in Natchez, Mississippi founded the Female Charitable Society, one of many ladies' associations in the early republic devoted to the care of poor and orphaned children. Born during a pervasive evangelical awakening, the Society established a charity school then, after a few years, constructed an orphan asylum. In doing so, benevolent women created not only a shelter for parentless boys and girls but a "civic household" of which they served as a collective head. Supported by charitable contributions rather than tax revenue, the orphan asylum functioned as a model environment, one that would rear prepubescent white children to be moral and industrious in trades that befit their born condition. The asylum also represented an opportunity for personal spiritual renewal on the part of donors as well as a landmark of municipal refinement. By promoting themselves as the natural caretakers of poor young children and fostering a culture of sympathy for them, benevolent women challenged the primacy of the statutory system of juvenile relief, which dated back to the earliest days of colonial settlement. Gradually, the Female Charitable Society raised the

standard of relief for prepubescent indigent minors, diverted them from bound apprenticeship, wrested jurisdiction over them from male county officials, and gathered them into the household. The female-run orphan asylum largely supplanted apprenticeship as the preferred system of juvenile relief in Natchez, mirroring developments in other cities around the country.

This study investigates why and how the orphan asylum emerged as a prominent form of juvenile relief in the United States. Using Natchez as a case study, this work underscores the role of benevolent women in effecting concrete transformations within the community as well as the impact of changes in domestic familial relations on child welfare. This study also expands the notion of "republican motherhood" to include "civic motherhood," that is, the public cultivation of maternal authority over poor children. Members of the Natchez Female Charitable Society positioned themselves as the rightful guardians of white, indigent boys and girls and was eventually granted legal authority over them by the State of Mississippi.

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Introduction

The Natchez Children's Home Services sits at the end of Union Street on the northern edge of downtown, a few hundred yards from the tall bluff overlooking the Mississippi River. Fronted by a lofty portico and surrounded by towering live oaks, it appears at first glance to be simply another of the antebellum residences for which the city is so famous. In fact, the spacious brick structure is relatively new, built in the 1950s to replace a true antebellum house which had served as the orphanage for nearly a hundred years. The original orphan asylum, founded in 1821, occupied a site a little further to the south, but was torn down long ago.[1]

The average traveler to Natchez would not think that this house on Union Street contained any historical significance. No marker stands out front, though outside many other buildings and on many street corners elsewhere a green, magnolia-studded plaque announces that something important happened there in the past. Indeed, on a tour of this city of just over eighteen thousand residents, one encounters nearly every period of American history. Almost five hundred years ago, Hernando de Soto was the first European to explore the region, then controlled by the Natchez Indians. Though gone now, their mounds and village sites serve as reminders of their centuries-long domination of southwestern Mississippi. The federal parkway known as the Natchez Trace cuts

[1] The history of the Natchez Children's Home Services has been featured in many articles in local Natchez newspapers, usually around the time of the institution's anniversary in March. See, for example, Kelly Beasley, "Children's Home Celebrates 180 Years," *Natchez Democrat*, April 23, 1995. The Natchez Children's Home Services website contains much of the above information as well as a timeline and photographs of the home, past and present; "History," http://www.natchezchildrenshome.org/template121.htm.

through the state diagonally and follows the old northeast path that Indians and "Kaintuck" boatmen traveled.[2]

Today, a historical marker is the only indicator of Fort Rosalie, the French garrison and settlement established in 1716, one year before New Orleans was founded down the river. The site of the fort commands a sweeping riparian view, and the water's edge is only a short walk away, down a little road carved into the bluff. Known as Natchez "Under-the Hill," this riverside strip of bars and restaurants facing a steamboat-turned-casino barely conveys the notoriety and commotion of what was once the gateway to Mississippi's vast cotton empire. Natchez supposedly boasted more millionaires than any other city in the United States before the Civil War.[3] However many there were, they all lived atop the bluff in the stately homes that today drive a vibrant and vital tourism industry. The houses are open year round, but during the "pilgrimage" season every spring and autumn, they display their full antebellum splendor with costumed guides. And in evening pageants, white ladies and gentlemen parade in hoop skirts and Confederate finery, giving the impression that the entire history of Natchez spanned the period depicted in first thirty minutes of *Gone with the Wind*.[4]

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[2] D. Clayton James discusses the early history of this community in *Antebellum Natchez* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968).

[3] That Natchez boasted more millionaires than any other city in the United States during the antebellum era is woven into local lore. Jack E. Davis discusses this impression in "A Struggle for History: Black and White Claims to Natchez's Past," *The Public Historian* 22 (Winter 2000): 45-46. William K. Scarborough has studied the tremendous wealth accumulated by elite Natchezians. See, for example, "Lords or Capitalists?: The Natchez Nabobs in a Comparative Perspective," *Journal of Mississippi History* 75 (September 1988): 239-67.

[4] For a scholarly assessment of the Natchez pilgrimage, see Steven D. Hoelscher, "Making Place, Making Race: Performances of Whiteness in the Jim Crow South," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 93 (2003): 657-86.

In recent years, these popular biannual events have embraced African American history of which there is much evidence: the house of William Johnson, a free man of color who kept a richly detailed diary in the 1840s; copious slave cabins attached to the grand homes; and the infamous "forks of the road," site of one of the nation's busiest slave markets.[5] The men who traded there probably thought the markets would stand forever, just as the nearby town of Washington was thought to be headed for greatness, like its namesake in the District of Columbia. Early in the nineteenth century, the territorial capital was relocated six miles to the east of Natchez, a move that slighted urban Federalists and rewarded rural Republicans.[6] Mississippi's first institution of higher education, Jefferson College, was founded there in 1802, but now the brick buildings sit vacant and the once-bustling campus contains more historical markers than people.[7]

Each of these sites represents a chapter of history that has since closed. The mounds lie idle, a grassy patch marks the site of the old fort, the area under the hill and

[5] In recent years, there has been an abundance of research on the history of African Americans in early Natchez. See Edwin Adams Davis and William Ransom Hogan, *The Barber of Natchez* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), which contextualizes the life of William Johnson and other free people of color before the Civil War. For a full transcript of his diary, see Edwin Adams Davis and William Ransom Hogan, eds., *William Johnson's Natchez: The Ante-Bellum Diary of a Free Negro* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951). See also David J. Libby, *Slavery and Frontier Mississippi, 1720-1835* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004) as well as Ronald L.F. Davis, The *Black Experience in Natchez, 1720-1880: Natchez, National Historical Park, Mississippi* (Denver: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1993) and *Good and Faithful Labor: From Slavery to Sharecropping in the Natchez District, 1860-1890* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982).

[6] See Guy B. Braden, A Jeffersonian Village: Washington, Mississippi," *Journal of Mississippi History* 30 (Spring 1968): 135-42.

[7] The most comprehensive study of this institution remains William T. Blain, *Education in the Old Southwest: A History of Jefferson College Washington, Mississippi* (Washington, MS: Friends of Jefferson College, 1976).

the grand homes on the bluff are caricatures of their former selves. The slave market has been empty since the collapse of that peculiar institution over a century ago.

Yet nearly two hundred years after its founding, the Natchez Children's Home Services continues to operate. The name has changed several times to reflect changing views of child welfare, but the structure and location of this Christian residential facility have remained virtually the same. A woman serves as director, and most of the staff are also women—exactly the situation two centuries ago. The Home has room for about a dozen children, boys and girls ranging from birth to seventeen, who receive their schooling there as well. Many of them live at the Home for a short period and are then placed with a relative or foster parents. Most of the children are not true orphans but still have one or both parents. The lack of a historical marker on this truly historic institution may be explained by its uninterrupted relevance. Unlike slavery, household fracturing and family dysfunction have not ended.

What about the beginning? The local lore surrounding the Natchez Children's Home Services purports that it was built because minors were in need and nothing was being done to help them.[8] However, the records in the county courthouse tell a different tale. Prior to the orphan asylum's founding in 1821 there *was* a system of child welfare, one based primarily on apprenticeship, which had suited Anglo-American communities from the earliest days of colonial settlement. Other records reveal that in the early nineteenth century this system came under attack by the Female Charitable Society, a

[8] The "local lore" of the institution will be discussed at length in the conclusion.

voluntary association of evangelical women in Natchez, who promoted residential care as a better form of juvenile relief.

Down the river in New Orleans, the Ursuline nuns had been caring for children in this manner for almost a hundred years. Indeed, this convent in French America is widely regarded by historians as the first orphanage in what is now the United States.[9] In fact, the children who helped make it "the first" came from the French fort situated on the bluff in present-day Natchez—survivors of a deadly Indian attack in 1729. Except for a few "orphan houses" founded by Protestant men, residential institutions devoted to children were largely absent from the Anglo-American landscape from the beginning of settlement through the eighteenth century, despite near constant warfare and other calamites that plagued the colonial period. Instead, poor and orphaned minors were supported by a civil system of relief adopted from England. Under this system, indigent children were apprenticed to individuals who provided basic care, rudimentary education, and vocational training in exchange for their labor. While some minors were placed informally with paid caretakers, statutory apprenticeship was the norm and the primary

[9] One of the earliest historians to make this claim was Homer Folks, a career social worker who chronicled American child welfare in *The Care of Destitute, Neglected, and Delinquent Children* (New York: The Macmillan Company 1902), 9. Despite its age, this work continues to serve as an influential secondary text on the history of early orphan asylums. Thomas A. Hacsi cites Folks when asserting that "the first orphanage in the area that would be the United States was established in New Orleans in 1729 under French auspices. The Ursuline convent had begun caring for one orphan soon after its establishment in 1727." *Second Home: Orphan Asylums and Poor Families in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 17. Additional historians who point to the Ursuline convent as the first juvenile residential care facility include Walter I. Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America*, 4th ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 108.

reason why Anglo-American communities did not gather needy children inside, as the Ursulines had.[10]

However, juvenile relief began to change throughout the United States at the turn of the nineteenth century, owing in large part to voluntary organizations like the Natchez Female Charitable Society. Founded in 1816 by white, affluent, Protestant women, the Society was one of many ladies' associations in the early republic devoted to the care of children. Impelled by a pervasive evangelical awakening, the Natchez women initially established a charity school as a means of "rescuing some youthful minds from the paths of ignorance and vice."[11] Before long, they began to challenge the statutory system of relief and promote the creation of a residential institution, which was finally achieved in 1821.

Benevolent women in Natchez sought to create not merely a shelter for parentless boys and girls, but a "civic household" of which they served as a collective head. Supported principally by charitable contributions rather than tax revenue, this household functioned as a model environment, one that would rear prepubescent white children to be moral and industrious members of the community. The asylum also represented an opportunity for personal spiritual renewal as well as a sign of municipal refinement. By promoting themselves as natural caretakers of young children and fostering a culture of

[10] Many communities constructed hospitals and almshouses, both of which regularly received children, yet they were not designed specifically for the care of minors. See Michael Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse* (New York: Basic Books, 1983) and Walter I. Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America*, 6th ed. (New York: Free Press, 1998).

[11] From the constitution of the Natchez Female Charitable Society transcribed in the entry dated March 12, 1816, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), Natchez Children's Home Records, 1816-1945, 1990, Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin (hereafter cited as Minutebook 1, NCHR).

sympathy for them, benevolent women gradually wrested jurisdiction over the welfare of young indigent minors from male county officials. Developments in Natchez mirrored changes around the country, and orphan asylums eventually supplanted apprenticeship as the preferred system of American juvenile relief.

Why did orphan asylums proliferate around the United States from the turn of the nineteenth century onward and not earlier? Why were women so instrumental in pushing for and achieving the reform of juvenile relief during the early republic? Though many scholars have studied American child welfare, very few have investigated the origin of orphan asylums. Social workers traced the history of juvenile residential institutions to the colonial and early national period but left the circumstances behind their creation largely unexplained.[12] By contrast, professional historians have generally identified 1830 as the date Americans "discovered" both poverty and the benefits of institutional care.[13] Indeed, scholars in this field have tended to highlight the emergence of Progressivism in

[12] A professional social worker like Homer Folks, Henry W. Thurston briefly discusses the orphanages of the colonial era but explores the English origins of American poor relief more thoroughly in *The Dependent Child: A Story of Changing Aims and Methods in the Care of Dependent Children* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1930).

[13] One of the first academics to write about American social welfare was Marcus Wilson Jernegan, whose *Laboring and Dependent Classes in Colonial America 1607-1783* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931) includes a lengthy analysis of colonial juvenile relief. Like the social worker-scholars before him, Jergegan was largely approaching history "from the needs of professional practice"; Clarke A. Chambers, "Toward a Redefinition of Welfare History," *Journal of American History* 73 (September 1986): 412. Richard Bremner set the trend of investigating American social welfare from 1830 onward in *From the Depths: The Discovery of Poverty in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 1956). David J. Rothman broke new ground in examining nineteenth-century institutional care by itself, and his *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971) remains a seminal work on the subject. However, like Bremner he largely overlooks the rise of orphan asylums before the Jacksonian era. The most comprehensive recent work on the history of residential care for children is Thomas A. Hacsi's *Second Home: Orphan Asylums and Poor Families in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997). Demonstrating the enduring importance of Homer Folks, Hacsi's brief section on orphan asylums before this date draws from his 1902 *The Care of Destitute, Neglected, and Delinquent Children*. More attention is currently being given to social welfare in the period between the Revolution and the election of Andrew Jackson as president, which generally marks the end of the "early American republic"; see Seth Rockman, *Welfare Reform in the Early Republic: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Bedford St. Martin's, 2002)

the late nineteenth century as the first watershed in the history of child welfare.[14] Great attention has been paid to the campaign against orphan asylums by Progressives, who regarded them as dungeons rather than sanctuaries. As a result, in the contest between "outdoor relief" (foster care and financial assistance to poor families) versus "indoor relief" (institutional care), outdoor measures became the norm for minors in the early twentieth century.[15] But why had indoor measures risen to prominence nearly a hundred years earlier? Using Natchez as a case study, this dissertation charts what may be considered the first child welfare reform movement in the United States, focusing primarily on trends and events from the end of the eighteenth century through the 1820s, a period commonly referred to as the early republic.[16]

Natchez serves as an ideal community for exploring the rise of the orphan asylum. The histories of early Natchez have typically focused on the subject of slavery, without

[14] Illustrative of the bias of social welfare historians toward developments of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Matthew A. Crenson completely omits the colonial and early republic as he explores the decline of institutional care and the origins of the federal welfare system in *Building the Invisible Orphanage: A Prehistory of the American Welfare System* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998). Additional works that focus on the Progressive Era include Murray Levine and Adeline Levine, *Helping Children: A Social History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); James Marten, *Childhood and Child Welfare in the Progressive Era: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 2005); and Alice Boardman Smuts, *Science in the Service of Children, 1893-1935* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

[15] Homer Folks uses the professional social work terms "outdoor" and "indoor" to differentiate between relief systems in *The Care of Destitute, Neglected, and Delinquent Children.* See also Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State*.

[16] While the descriptor "antebellum" is more usually applied to early studies of Mississippi, I am using the term "early republic" because the bulk of this story occurs from 1816 to 1825, a time when Natchezians were busy aligning themselves with the political, social, and cultural institutions of the new American nation. Moreover, the term "early republic" more accurately reflects how Natchezians project themselves at this time: not as Southerners but as Americans solidly linked with every section of the country. In Chapter 6, some developments of the 1830s are discussed because the second minutebook of the Female Charitable Society, spanning the years 1823 to 1834, is missing.

question a defining feature of the community's economic, social, and political terrain.[17] However, this Southern city is also important for its role in the reform of America child welfare. As scholars have recently shown, Southerners were involved with poor relief along with Northerners, whose benevolent activities have traditionally dominated the field of inquiry.[18] However, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, geographical distinctions and regional identities became somewhat blurred as American nationalism and Protestant evangelism forged ties among communities, ties that would later unravel as slavery became more divisive.[19] To be sure, one cannot consider the history of early Natchez without taking into account African-Americans, who generally comprised more than half the population. Barbara L. Bellows has deftly shown that the planter class viewed benevolence as consistent with a slave-owning society. Indeed, the orphan house constructed in Charleston served to reinforce white racial superiority while

[17] See, for example, Winthrop D. Jordan, *Tumult and Silence at Second Creek: An Inquiry into a Civil War Slave Conspiracy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993); Michael Wayne, *Death of an Overseer: Reopening a Murder Investigation from the Plantation South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); William Kauffman Scarborough, *Masters of the Big House: Elite Slaveholders of the Mid-Nineteenth-Century South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003); David J. Libby, Slavery and Frontier Mississippi, 1720-1835 (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), and Timothy Ryan Buckner, *Constructing Identities on the Frontier of Slavery, Natchez, Mississippi, 1760-1860* (PhD diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2005).

[18] Two recent works which indicate a departure from the standard northern focus of social welfare historians are Barbara L. Bellows, *Benevolence Among Slaveholders: Assisting the Poor in Charleston, 1670-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993) and Elna C. Green, *This Business of Relief: Confronting Poverty in a Southern City, 1740-1940* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003).

[19] The issue of Southern identity and distinctiveness has been the subject of numerous studies, in particular the work of Bertram Wyatt-Brown; see, for example, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) and *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1890s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). Christopher Morris looks at "Southerness" in the region north of Natchez in *Becoming Southern: The Evolution of a Way of Life, Warren County and Vicksburg, Mississippi, 1770-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). Like these scholars, Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese place slavery as the key characteristic of the South; see *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

testifying to the public of Southerners' profound philanthropy.[20] As a slave society with a deeply entrenched racial hierarchy, Natchez gives rise to similar questions and contradictions with respect to benevolence. How could women organize on behalf of poor white children while virtually ignoring the enslaved boys and girls in their possession? Furthermore, why did white citizens promote the education of Indian children in distant missions but seek to curtail the instruction of slaves? This dissertation concurs that slavery permeated every aspect of Natchez society; indeed, its prevalence may have led benevolent women to seek a form of relief for poor children that did not bear so many similarities to bound servitude. Though located in what was then the extreme southwest of the United States, Natchez stood at the forefront of social welfare developments, which led to increasing stratification of minors throughout the country.

The role of women in bringing about child welfare reform nearly a hundred years before Progressives organized for a similar purpose is a key focus of this study.[21] As Nancy Cott, Anne Firor Scott, and other historians of gender have shown, American women were organizing on behalf of minors in the years following the Revolution and throughout the early republic, a period when associational activity was surging around

[20] Bellows, *Benevolence Among Slaveholders*, 122. "A unique blend of Christian charity and southern liberalism combined with the precepts of racial supremacy to form the ideological matrix for the orphan house. It stood as a showplace where travelers and skeptics could witness the true philanthropy that animated southern hearts. Few who watched healthy children dashing around among the statuary that dotted an expansive lawn could doubt the munificence of this community. Local leaders hoped that the sight of rescued youngsters at play and prayer would give the lie to all the vicious insinuations about the misanthropy of southerners and the perniciously brutalizing effects of their society." Ibid., 133.

[21] Robyn Muncy dates the rise of women's prominence in child welfare reform at the turn of the twentieth century in *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

the country.[22] Lori D. Ginzberg and Anne M. Boylan have examined women's role in founding orphan asylums at the turn of the nineteenth century, but did so through the broader subject of female organized benevolence—that is, analyzing groups devoted to children along with those targeting the dissemination of religious tracts or the rehabilitation of prostitutes. These scholars tend to emphasize the importance of women's associational activism as an early chapter in the American feminist narrative as well as the personal gain of women engaged in charitable work.[23] Some of the most intense discussion has centered on the role of organized charity in helping women break from the confines of private domesticity to secure legitimate participation in an otherwise male-dominated "public sphere."[24] To be sure, the formation of charitable associations

[22] Originally published in 1977, Nancy Cott's *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) was one of the earliest works to consider female benevolence in the early republic while Anne Firor Scott's *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991) looks at female associational activity more comprehensively. Additional works of gender history which touch upon organized female benevolence during the early republic are Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981) and Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986). See also, Richard A. Meckel, "Educating a Ministry of Mothers: Evangelical Maternal Associations, 1815-1860" *Journal of the Early Republic* 2 (Winter 1982): 403-23; Amy Gilman, "From Widowhood to Wickedness: The Politics of Class and Gender in New York City Private Charity, 1799-1860" *History of Education Quarterly* 24 (Spring 1984): 59-74; and Margaret Morris Haviland, "Beyond Women's Sphere: Young Quaker Women and the Veil of Charity in Philadelphia, 1790-1810" *The William and Mary Quarterly* 51 (July 1994): 419-46.

[23] See Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) and Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). Though writing about a later period, one of the earliest monographs to focus entirely on women's organized benevolence is Karen J. Blair's *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1980).

[24] The work of philosopher Jürgen Habermas has had a profound effect on gender scholarship, in particular *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), which was originally published in 1962. While the notion of public versus private existed in Europe at least as far back as antiquity, Habermas proposes that a third entity, the "public sphere," emerged in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries due to the shift from a monarchical, feudal order toward a more democratic, capitalistic state. Consequently, the bourgeoisie expanded and assumed more control over its well-being, but the collective power of bourgeois individuals was directed at protecting the general interest from the whims of public authority, not at

contributed to the gradual dissolution of gender barriers in American society, yet this dissertation examines how benevolent women infused one segment of the public sphere with domesticity and thus brought a traditionally male responsibility—the relief of indigent children—under female jurisdiction. The transformation of womanhood through associational activity is an important part of the story as well as how women effected concrete transformations in both the practice of juvenile relief and the community at large.

The aforementioned scholars primarily target Northern cities, but one of the most thorough considerations of women's role in launching early orphan asylums and shaping child welfare involves a city in the South. By reconstructing the multifaceted lives of women in Petersburg, Virginia, after the Revolution and before the Civil War, Suzanne Lebsock deftly situates organized benevolence within female experience and local exigencies.[25] Lebsock does not investigate what exactly led to the founding of the Female Orphan Asylum in 1811-1812, for too few records survive to yield a clear picture.[26] The records pertaining to the Natchez Female Charitable Society, while full of gaps and omissions, are detailed enough to support her contention that "motherhood—the passionate concern for the shape of the world their children would grow up in" played a

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usurping its authority to rule. Through newspapers and meeting places, private individuals became a public force in exchanging information and ideas. His theory has given scholars of women's organized benevolence a framework to explain how individuals confined to a domestic realm by virtue of their sex could transcend those boundaries without ever seeming to leave them. As Anne Firor Scott eloquently summarizes in the introduction to her book: "women, constrained by law and custom, and denied access to most of the major institutions by which the society governed itself and created its culture, used voluntary associations to evade some of these constraints and to redefine 'woman's place' by giving the concept a public dimension"; *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History*, 2.

[25] Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984). Chapter 7 focuses on female organized benevolence.

[26] Ibid., 199

significant part in guiding women in voluntary action on behalf of poor and orphaned minors.[27]

For some time, the concept of "Republican Mothers," introduced by Linda K. Kerber, has dominated historiographical discourse pertaining to the white, affluent American women in the decades after the Revolution, though scholars are beginning to challenge the primacy of this analytical framework.[28] Expanding upon both Lebsock and Kerber, this dissertation proposes "civic motherhood" as framework that more precisely captures what caused and sustained female benevolence in the early republic. As childrearing and household management were coming to be seen as principally female endeavors, some women also began to cultivate maternal authority outside their own homes over the children of the poor. In an effort to improve the condition of young indigent minors, civic mothers created a separate household in the community, gathered poor children inside, and controlled nearly every facet of their upbringing. Civic mothers need not have been "mothers" in their own right—indeed, some women involved in establishing orphan asylums were unmarried or otherwise childless. Improving the future prospects of poor children was a major concern of these women, but never was there an attempt to raise the level of care to that enjoyed by their own elite sons and daughters.

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[27] Ibid., 208. Anne M. Boylan also emphasizes the significance of personal maternal experiences through the "portraits" of several women involved in the founding of charitable societies. *The Origins of Women's Activism*, chap. 3.

[28] Though Linda K. Kerber looks primarily at the period during and just after the American Revolution, her concept of "Republican Motherhood" has come to encompass women in the early part of the nineteenth century as well. Margaret A. Nash challenges the notion that opportunities for female education increased mainly to facilitate the rearing of virtuous republican sons in "Rethinking Republican Motherhood: Benjamin Rush and the Young Ladies' Academy of Philadelphia," *Journal of the Early Republic* 17 (Summer 1996), 171-72.

Civic mothers began their work as "benevolent women," and this term is used throughout this study to describe more accurately the initial role of those involved in the Natchez Female Charitable Society.[29] Though legally impotent and politically mute, the women of this association differed from others of their sex in possessing the means and the influence to alter juvenile relief and establish a civic household whose government was remarkably matriarchal in form. This is not to say that patriarchy was jettisoned as a result of female benevolence. As Bruce Dorsey points out in his study, women and men engaged in reform during the early nineteenth century were largely impelled by twin forces of republican virtue and Christian ideals, and gender carved separate provinces. Female authority over the moral and spiritual welfare of young children was not only widely sanctioned by men but strengthened through male support and participation in benevolent undertakings.[30]

Without question, religion played a highly significant role in the ability of women to assume this public maternal authority. The Ursuline nuns of New Orleans and the confraternity of Catholic laywomen who assisted them supported orphans as a form of religious expression, a path that Protestant women would embark on around the turn of the nineteenth century. Much has been written about the great "awakening" that swept through the United States and evangelical "conversion" of the South and West by

[29] Lori D. Ginzberg periodically refers to those engaged in organized female charity as "benevolent women" in *Women and the Work of Benevolence* as does Nancy Hewitt in *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872*, repr. (1984; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

[30] Though he concentrates primarily upon the work of male reformers, Bruce Dorsey reinforces the findings of the aforementioned scholars that child welfare was an area that tended to fall to women; *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002). In a similar vein, Linda K. Kerber looks at benevolent societies within a broader study of female domesticity in *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*.

Northern missionaries, but Natchez challenges the dominant narrative of Southern evangelicalism, for during most of its early history the established church was Catholic rather than Anglican.[31] This study examines the reform of juvenile relief within the context of the community's religious transformation and demonstrates the role of women in fueling this change.[32] Rather than shrink into a cult of domesticity, well-to-do Protestant women in Natchez turned benevolence into a public spiritual exercise and acted as missionaries among poor white children, instilling morality and piety in them out of Christian charity and for the purpose of social conditioning. This dissertation also takes a closer look at how literary productions may have inspired and shaped religious activity among women. Of particular focus are religious tracts, writings which indicate a

[31] Often referred to as the "Second Great Awakening," the ascendance of evangelical religion in the South has been the subject of numerous scholarly studies, an important example of which is John B. Boles, *The Great Revival: Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), a revised edition of his 1972 work. Fred J. Hood focuses on Presbyterianism, the denomination which gained especial prominence in Natchez, in *Reformed America: The Middle and Southern States* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1980). Hood also examines the objective of evangelicals to impose "social control" on the lower classes, a theme echoed in Anne C. Loveland's *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980). Protestant missionaries, Presbyterians in particular, were slow to ignite the religious spark among Southerners according to John W. Kuykendall in *Southern Enterprize: The Work of National Evangelical Societies in the Antebellum South* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982). See also Robert M. Calhoon, *Evangelicals and Conservatives in the Early South, 1740-1861* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1988); Philip N. Mulder, *A Controversial Spirit: Evangelical Awakenings in the South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); and Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), which deals extensively with religious developments in the South. Though Natchez is not a focus in Randall M. Miller and Jon L. Wakelyn, eds. *Catholics in the Old South: Essays on Church and Culture* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1983), this compilation is useful for highlighting the prevalence of Catholicism in Southern communities.

[32] Christine Leigh Heyrman examines the participation women in evangelical transformation of the South, yet she holds their role to be relatively marginal as a result of the prevailing patriarchal outlook; *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). As this dissertation will show, the study of Natchez challenges some of her findings, in particular that early evangelicals were egalitarian and that religious women retreated from public life deeper in the domestic sphere. Historians of antebellum reform movements, which largely sprang from the "awakenings" of the early nineteenth century, have generally analyzed gender with greater care. See Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) and T. Gregory Garvey, *Creating the Culture of Reform in Antebellum America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006).

decidedly stratified social vision among evangelicals and demonstrate the interconnectedness of early republic evangelical projects, namely "rescuing" poor white children while "civilizing" Indian boys and girls.[33]

Other important historiographical discussions in this study include the transformation of apprenticeship by indenture, which lay at the heart of the Anglo-American civil system of child welfare. The few historians who have examined apprenticeship note its decreased popularity after the Revolution and attribute that shift to rising industrialization and disintegrating patriarchal authority.[34] Apprenticeship as a form of poor relief, however, did not so much decline as metamorphose, and in Natchez, female benevolence clearly influenced this change. Indeed, a growing concern for white prepubescent minors led the members of the Female Charitable Society to challenge the authority of male officials and alter an institution that emphasized labor over education

[33] Very little has been written about Protestant evangelism among Indians during the early republic. Among the few works, see especially Robert F. Berkhofer, *Salvation and the Savage: An Analysis of Protestant Missions and American Indian Response, 1787-1862* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965) and Clara Sue Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi, 1818-1918* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995). Jon F. Sensbach indicates that the study of religion in the South may be heading in a more integrated direction in "Before the Bible Belt: Indians, Africans, and the New Synthesis of Eighteenth-Century Southern Religious History" in Beth Barton Schweiger and Donald G. Mathews, eds., *Religion in the American South: Protestants and Others in History and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

[34] Carl Bridenbaugh briefly discusses apprenticeship, dividing it into "voluntary" (i.e., craft transmission) and "compulsory" (i.e., poor relief) in his classic monograph *The Colonial Craftsman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961, c1950), 131. One of the earliest works to focus specifically on American apprenticeship is Robert Francis Seybolt, *Apprenticeship and Apprenticeship Education in Colonial New England and New York* (New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1969). W. J. Rorabaugh examines apprenticeship from the Revolution to the Civil War and attributes its wane to increasing industrialization and immigration in *The Craft Apprentice from Franklin to the Machine Age in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). The diminishment of the patriarchal family as the center of juvenile education lay behind apprenticeship's decline according to Bernard Bailyn in *Education in the Forming of American Society: Needs and Opportunities for Study* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 15-36. Ian M. G. Quimby supports Bailyn's theory, yet attributes the decline more to "the process of modernization" and the destructive force of rationalizing human activity. He also cautions against American exceptionalism, asserting that apprenticeship began to disintegrate in England much earlier, during the mid-seventeenth century; *Apprenticeship in Colonial Philadelphia* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1985), 3-4, 140-56.

for young children and contained no provision for religious instruction. Expanding the scope of the history of American education is another aim of this study. Traditionally neglected areas, such as the role of benevolent women in organizing schools for poor white children at the turn of nineteenth century and the parallels between charity education and the "civilization" of Indian children are explored.[35] Finally, this dissertation continues to push the history of childhood in new directions by investigating minors who have largely fallen outside scholarly discussions.[36] The dearth of documentary evidence has traditionally consigned poor white children to the margins, yet this study examines them alongside other contemporary groups of children—enslaved,

[35] The most comprehensive work on the subject of education during the early republic remains Lawrence A. Cremin's *American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), which focuses primarily on the education of elite children. Charity schools and the instruction of Indians, blacks, and other "outsiders" are discussed, but no comparative analysis is made. Carl F. Kaestle briefly discusses charity schools, though he does not consider the involvement of benevolent women in charity education in *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983). While there is no monograph focusing specifically on Indian education during the early republic, Margaret Connell Szasz explores the "Christianizing" of young Indian children, the precursor of the "civilization" projects of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in *Indian Education in the American Colonies, 1607-1783* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988). Works on the civilization of Indians at the turn of the twentieth century include David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995) and Amelia V. Katanski, *Learning to Write "Indian": The Boarding-School Experience and American Indian Literature* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005).

[36] Philippe Ariès focuses on the experiences of elite white children in his seminal *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), which has greatly influenced historians of childhood in America, such as John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Daniel Blake Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980); Linda A. Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500 to 1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983) and *A Lasting Relationship: Parents and Children over Three Centuries* (London: Fourth Estate, 1987); and more recently, Karin Calvert in *Children in the House: The Material Culture of Early Childhood, 1600-1900* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992). Historians have begun to examine more closely the experiences of children outside this group, such as Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in 19th Century America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998) and Marie Jenkins Scwartz, *Born in Bondage: Growing Up Enslaved in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000). Steven Mintz undertakes a more comprehensive analysis by race, class, and gender in *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (New York: Belknap Press, 2004).

free black, Indian, and affluent white—to understand more fully their experiences and their sudden rise to benevolent notice.[37]

The rise of the orphan asylum as civic household in early republic Natchez is explored both chronologically and thematically. Chapter 1, "Female Charitable Society," examines the emergence of charity as a spiritual exercise and a supplement to existing relief. The turn of the nineteenth century marked a period of great religious revival. As evangelical Protestants from the Northeast strove for "hopeful conversions" among their own believers, they also sought to advance religion among spiritually-deprived communities around the nation, particularly those of the South and West. Presbyterian minister Daniel Smith visited the notorious port city of Natchez in 1816 and achieved unprecedented success in "awakening" its inhabitants to Christianity. In addition to leading church services, organizing prayer concerts, and conducting family visits, he encouraged the ladies of the community to form a society for the instruction and, if necessary, the support of poor children. While he could have prevailed upon the gentlemen to form a charity or seek changes in existing relief, he instead promoted the idea among those who were becoming regarded as the natural caretakers of young minors.

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[37] Philip Greven explores differing attitudes toward children among well-to-do American parents in *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), yet he neglects to consider how evangelicals promoted emotional investment in the children of others as well. Some who note transitions in perceptions of children include: Joseph Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1977); Anne M. Boylan, "Sunday Schools and Changing Evangelical Views of Children in the 1820s" *Church History*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (Sep. 1979): 320-333; Jacqueline S. Reinier, *From Virtue to Character: American Childhood, 1775-1850* (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1996); Holly Brewer, *By Birth or Consent: Children, Law, and the Anglo-American Revolution in Authority* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

At first, the ladies objected to the minister's suggestion on grounds that there was no need for such a charity, as a civil system of relief had been in place for years. However, after looking into the condition of poor children, they formed the Female Charitable Society. Its members—who as widows had to receive dispensation for the guardianship of their own children, who could not vote, and who were severely limited in acting legally for themselves—commanded an influence almost unimaginable had they attempted to perform benevolence as individuals. The Female Charitable Society resembled sister associations in its structure and evangelical, nonsectarian outlook, but there were notable differences, in particular its assistance of boys as well as girls. Similar societies elsewhere usually focused only on aiding female children, an indication that, in Natchez, imported ideas were tailored to meet perceived local needs. Members had probably noticed the poor children of Natchez before the missionary pointed them out, but in the context of rising evangelicalism, existing relief measures no longer seemed adequate.

How the Female Charitable Society created a community of parents for poor children is the focus of Chapter 2, "The Power of Sympathy." Women's organized benevolence did not immediately gain universal approval among Americans, and the Natchez Female Charitable Society had its share of detractors. Many in the community held fast to the members' initial opinion that the charity was superfluous. Having to rely on voluntary donations, the Society fostered a culture of sympathy to sway critics and achieve benevolent goals. The old system had operated largely behind the scenes—the public paid taxes to a collector and overseers of the poor placed children in private

households—but benevolent women thrust the plight of young indigent minors into the public's awareness by encouraging a personal as well as philanthropic investment. The Society pitifully referred to them as "orphans," though most had at least one parent living. Drawing from fictional portrayals and narrative accounts, benevolent women highlighted the dangers of custodial neglect of young children and positioned them as a community responsibility.

The promotion of sympathy was made easier by the fact that the Female Charitable Society targeted prepubescent minors who were pliable, impressionable, and greatly susceptible to the vagaries of life. But not all young children were seen to be equal. The Society focused on boys and girls who were white, in other words, children who looked the most like the members' own sons and daughters. While the "civilization" of Indian children was of great emotional interest to many benevolent individuals, there seems to have been no thought of raising whites and Native Americans together. Enslaved children fell outside the scope of community sympathy and assistance altogether, as the "patronage" of masters and mistresses was apparently deemed sufficient. Benevolent women characterized the increased assistance of poor white children as imperative and presented relief as an opportunity for personal spiritual regeneration. Taxes were a necessary evil, but charity could uplift the soul and bring one closer to God.

Chapter 3, "Charity Academy," looks at the Female Charitable Society's initial efforts in creating a school for poor children as well as its failed experiment in republican education. At first, members sought to promote universal white education, as George

Washington had tried—unsuccessfully—two decades earlier in Virginia. The Society's school, the Natchez Lancastrian Academy, taught much more than the reading, writing, and arithmetic promised children as apprentices. Instruction was based on an English educational method that was sweeping the rest of the nation, and it was open to all white minors. Despite hopes that it would become the city's premier educational institution, the academy languished because parents—including some of the Society's members—declined to have their sons and daughters instructed alongside the charity children, a problem that Washington had encountered in his own school. In the end, the Society narrowed its scope to "a good plain education" as befit the station of charity children. Sympathy, it seems, was more easily promoted among affluent citizens when the "orphans" were raised according to their perceived natural condition.

Chapter 4, "'The Cheerless Support Allow'd by Our Laws,'" considers how the Female Charitable Society directly challenged the old system of juvenile relief. The Society believed that rudimentary instruction and religious and moral cultivation were essential to "rescuing some youthful minds from the paths of ignorance and vice." However, it was difficult to educate children who lacked basic necessities, such as sufficient clothing. Benevolent women readily surmounted this difficulty by sewing outfits for the children themselves and engaging charity girls as assistants so they could develop an employable skill. As a result, the Society expanded the standard of care promised under the old system of relief. Apprentices were guaranteed a new suit of clothes only upon the completion of their term, but Society members regularly furnished new outfits on the grounds that virtue was fostered by a neat appearance. However, to

prevent the "orphans" from developing exorbitant tastes, they were dressed plainly and in uniform.

The ample provision of clothing was only one way in which the Society challenged the old system. Support was supposed to have been a secondary concern, but some children required total care and so were placed with a hired matron. As benevolent women sought to elevate the standard of care provided to poor children, they also began to dispute—in print—the efficacy of laws that denied public support to some children based on residency. These clashes with county officials over the adherence to settlement restrictions led the Society to extend relief to minors out of perceived need and worthiness rather than geographical situation. Members also successfully challenged the supremacy of apprenticeship, which in many ways resembled the dominant form of bound labor in Mississippi. The designation of guardians as "masters" and "mistresses," their almost absolute control of the minors in their care, as well as the ignominy of "runaways," conspired to make apprenticeship appear almost like slavery.

Chapter 5, "Sanctuary," examines specific reasons why benevolent women sought to establish an orphan asylum for poor children in Natchez as well as the broader context of this project. One year after the Female Charitable Society's founding, the first of many epidemics of yellow fever hit Natchez, leaving a number of orphans in its wake. But disease was not the only reason that members wanted a civic household. Adults, it seems, were proving equally dangerous. At this time, there were several documented instances of sexual assault on poor white girls within their own homes. Boys also required sanctuary, as evidenced by cases of abused male apprentices brought before the

orphan's court. Benevolent women believed that they could afford young children greater protection by gathering them inside and tending to their upbringing themselves.

Indoor relief was not unprecedented in the region. The Ursuline convent in New Orleans was taking care of orphan girls as far back as the 1720s, but this Catholic model did not take hold in predominately Anglo-American Natchez until there were Protestant examples to draw from. The household envisioned by benevolent women could be traced back over a century to the work of a Pietist clergyman in Saxony, who had founded a Protestant orphan house mainly to protect poor children from the deleterious influence of their parents. Drawing from his example, evangelical minister George Whitfield constructed one in Georgia in 1740. Though he promoted it for the sake of donations, he never seemed to advocate the establishment of orphan houses in other colonies. The city fathers of Charleston built a house for orphans in 1790, but it was benevolent women who succeeded in popularizing "asylums" in urban centers throughout the country. The Female Charitable Society emphasized the perilous situation of poor children and promoted the creation of a community sanctuary for them. An orphan asylum also helped streamline charitable operations and allow for greater control over the upbringing of young minors. Additionally, it also served as a visible testament to progress—an indicator that Natchez was no longer a frontier outpost but, instead, a wholly civilized community.

Chapter 6, "Civic Household," explores the establishment of the Female Orphan Asylum, a residence whose governance was distinctly matriarchal. Built nearly one hundred years after the attack that created the community's "first" group of orphans, the

asylum was located in a genteel part of town, far from the vicious dockside. The Society designed the household to be more commodious and refined than anything the charity children had previously experienced, though not so elegant as to raise them above their station. Like neat clothing, a well-ordered domicile, run on a schedule and staffed with watchful matrons and teachers, would reinforce instruction and serve as a model environment for poor children.

As many taxpayers had feared, the asylum was very expensive to run, and Society members found themselves trying to make ends meet. At the same time, the excitement that had initially surrounded the charitable project began to subside, and donations diminished correspondingly. Though boys comprised nearly half the charity children and many had parents, the women continued to project the impression that orphaned girls were the principal object of relief in order cast a more pitiable aura around the institution. Members continued their public sympathetic appeals, but they also sought funding from the state. Eventually, the Mississippi legislature granted the asylum an annual stipend and conferred upon the ladies legal guardianship over resident orphans.

Ultimately, benevolent women achieved lasting effects on public policy with respect to indigent minors. For example, the statutes were altered a few years after the Society's founding so that overseers of the poor were directed to concern themselves primarily with free minors of color, who did not benefit from public charity. Moreover, indenture records show that prepubescent white children largely disappeared from the county apprenticeship track as the Society undertook their "placement" with select guardians, an arrangement designed to be more familial in nature. In becoming civic

mothers, benevolent women secured jurisdiction over white boys and girls, and their voluntary enterprise—born of evangelical fervor—at last became "the system."

Many child welfare institutions trace their origin to the early republic. Very few continue to retain a similar physical and administrative structure as does the Natchez Children's Home Services. The story of how and why the civic household came to be in the community may shed light on why it continues to operate, long after other sites became tourist attractions.

1

Female Charitable Society

> Hitherto there has been among the inhabitants of Natchez, very little religious charitable exertion. To excite a spirit of charity, therefore, would be an essential benefit, as well to those who should exercise it, as to those that might be the objects of it. With this view, I recommended, to a few ladies, the formation of a Society…[1]

The rise of the orphan asylum in Natchez lies squarely in the Second Great Awakening, and to follow contemporary ministerial accounts, it took some mighty labor to help God's word take root. Presbyterian missionaries had visited Natchez for nearly fifteen years when the Reverend Daniel Smith arrived there in the spring of 1816, yet he found it "deplorably destitute of the stated means of grace."[2] Though Smith had traveled there the year before with Samuel Mills, a fellow minister from the Northeast, not much had happened to further religion during the interval. Some pious gentlemen had indebted themselves to construct a Presbyterian church; however, the brick structure sat completely empty. And the Mississippi Bible Society, co-founded by Reverend Mills during his first visit to Natchez in 1813, languished for lack of participation, even with the territorial governor serving as president.[3]

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[1] From a letter by Daniel Smith to the Presbyterian Board of Missions, dated June 9, 1816 and printed in *Religious Remembrancer* 51(August 16, 1817): 201.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Samuel J. Mills and Daniel Smith, *Report of a Missionary Tour Through That Part of the United States Which Lies West of the Allegany Mountains* (Andover: Flagg and Gould, 1815). Portions of their narrative were published in several contemporary religious newspapers as well. Samuel Mills was a theological student at Andover before he undertook the missionary trip to Natchez on behalf of the Missionary Society

A bustling port city on the eastern bank of the Mississippi River, Natchez was the seat of Adams County, which had a population of approximately 3,600 white inhabitants in 1816. Many recent immigrants had improved their fortunes, and some had realized vast profits off the burgeoning demand for cotton, made possible by the labor of nearly 6,400 black slaves.[4] But on the whole, the gentlemen of Natchez seemed disinclined to open their pocketbooks for Jesus. As one contemporary traveler observed: "With religion they have nothing to do, having formed a treaty with her, the principal article of which is, 'Trouble not us, nor will we trouble you.'"[5]

If Presbyterian missionaries had experienced little success, the Baptists seemed to be thriving in the Mississippi Territory. With famed itinerant preacher Lorenzo Dow visiting Natchez in February 1816, the Methodists seemed to be gaining ground as well. To better promote Christianity in general and Presbyterianism in particular, Daniel Smith changed his evangelical tactics. Instead of recruiting foot soldiers only among the gentlemen, he turned to the ladies.[6]

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of Connecticut. He communicates the details of that trip, including the founding of the Mississippi Bible Society in a letter, which was subsequently printed in the *Connecticut Evangelical Magazine and Religious Intelligencer* 6:7 (July 1813): 268. John W. Kuykendall discusses the various missionary trips of Smith and Mills and the founding of the Mississippi Bible Society in *Southern Enterprize: The Work of National Evangelical Societies in the Antebellum South* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982), 31-34. However, no mention is made of Smith's role in encouraging the formation of the Female Charitable Society, and the author erroneously identifies him as being from Georgia.

[4] Population figures taken from the 1816 census of the Mississippi Territory, printed in the *Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer*, November 20, 1816.

[5] Schultz, Christian. *Travels on an Inland Voyage through the States of New-York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee, and through the Territories of Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi and New-Orleans…* (New York: Isaac Riley, 1810).

[6] Notice of a sermon to be delivered by Lorenzo Dow printed in the *Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer*, February 14, 1816. On their western journey in 1815, Mills and Smith took great pains to report the number of churches and preachers for each denomination. The Mississippi territory had around twenty Baptist preachers, the Methodists a dozen, and the Presbyterians only four, all catering to a population of 43,000 inhabitants. Mills and Smith, *Report of a Missionary Tour Through That Part of the United States Which Lies West of the Allegany Mountains*, 26.

Reverend Smith proposed that they form a society for the education and support of poor children in Natchez and the surrounding area. "It was strenuously objected to at first, that there was no necessity for such an institution," the missionary informed his superiors; "but, after a little inquiry into the state of the poor, the objection ceased."[7] A meeting was held, a constitution drafted, and officers elected in order to govern the Female Charitable Society, as it was called. Within a couple of months, more than seventy women had subscribed to the new organization and contributed over a thousand dollars,[8] three times the amount that the Mississippi Bible Society had collected from the gentlemen.[9] The funds were immediately put to use. A poor widow and a few indigent boys and girls were granted support; the children were enrolled with a local teacher; and plans were made to establish a permanent charity school.[10] By the summer of 1816, the state of religion in Natchez seemed to be changing for the better. In his reports to the Presbyterian Board of Missions, which were subsequently reprinted in evangelical publications throughout the East, Daniel Smith gave the ladies a great deal of the credit.[11]

In the minister's native New England, women had long figured prominently in church membership. Attending services strengthened religious constitution, a vital

[7] *Religious Remembrancer* 51(August 16, 1817): 201.
[8] From the first entry (no date), Minutebook 1, NCHR.
[9] Samuel Mills and Daniel Smith noted in 1815 that the Bible Society had collected only $300 upon its founding; *Report of a Missionary Tour Through That Part of the United States Which Lies West of the Allegany Mountains*, 28.
[10] Except for the actual name of the Female Charitable Society, Daniel Smith reports all the above details in his letter to the Presbyterian Board of Missions; *Religious Remembrancer* 51(August 16, 1817): 201.
[11] Additional letters from Daniel Smith which allude to the Female Charitable Society appear in *Recorder* 5:20 (May 15, 1816): 78; *The Christian Monitor* 4:2 (April-June, 1817), 51; and *Boston Recorder* 2:41 (October 7, 1817): 172.

prerequisite for the proper rearing of children and maintaining the sanctity of the home.[12] Yet during the "awakenings" of the early nineteenth century, women embarked on a more public religious expression, especially through the voluntary benevolent activity. "Benevolence" permeated the world view of evangelicals and was a driving force behind national organizations like the American Bible Society and American Education Society.[13] Since the late eighteenth century, the zeal for benevolence had also led a number of women to form voluntary associations of their own. While this phenomenon has been well chronicled by scholars of gender, those who focus primarily on religion have tended to overlook the existence of female charitable societies as their role as agents, not simply as products, of evangelical dissemination.[14] Children were widely

[12] Jon Butler notes that since the seventeenth century New England women were more likely than men to achieve church membership early in life, a reflection of the Puritan emphasis on female influence in family religion. Women's religious involvement continued to rise through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and while still heavily excluded from ministerial roles, voluntary organizations became a key medium of pious expression. *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 170, 281-82. Philip N. Mulder asserts that during the period of antebellum revival, women remained subordinate within the church, yet gained importance as symbols and conduits of spirituality; *A Controversial Spirit: Evangelical Awakenings in the South*, 142-44.

[13] Kuykendall, *Southern Enterprize*, 8-18.

[14] Lori D. Ginzberg situates female associational activity firmly within the "moral reform" concerns of evangelicals. *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), especially chapter 1. Anne M. Boylan argues that evangelicalism expanded opportunities for women at the turn of the nineteenth century, and formed a new domestic ideal that included female organized benevolence. *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 7-9. Anne Firor Scott writes that "though the swift rise of the benevolent society is often described as a response to the Second Great Awakening, the impulse to organize was not limited to places where the revival spirit struck." *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 13. Indeed, as Suzanne Lebsock points out, female charitable activity sometimes predated revivals. For example, the ladies of Petersburg, Virginia organized a Sunday School several years before evangelical "revival" commenced. Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg*, 216-18. While Robert Abzug focuses largely on Northern developments, he deeply explores the prominence of evangelical women in antebellum reform movements; *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Anne C. Loveland writes that "Evangelicals frequently cooperated with or assisted charitable societies which aimed to supply the temporal needs of the poor. Many such societies were formed and administered by women"; *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1980), 167. Though she mentions a few organizations, she regards them as peripheral rather than central to evangelization. Jon W. Kuykendall

regarded as prime soil for the cultivation of grace, as their instruction—especially among those who were poor—would reap for the faithful a bountiful harvest.[15]

Groups formed by women did not fall under the auspices of a central governing body like those run by men, but their similar scope and structure linked them together as a network. At first, this network concentrated in the Northeast, yet over time new female societies appeared outside this region. The comparative sparseness and rurality of the South and West has led some historians to overlook the formation of voluntary associations there and presume that a deeply entrenched patriarchal order likewise discouraged women from organizing and managing their own societies, even those that were religious in nature.[16] Yet Daniel Smith's suggestion that the women assume a more active, public role in the name of charity seems to have been initially rebuffed on grounds of perceived lack of necessity rather than perceived gender impropriety.

The numerous benevolent associations founded by middle and upper class women at the turn of the nineteenth century are usually characterized as offshoots of religious

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opens his monograph with a quotation from a female benevolent association, but he does not discuss it further or examine the proliferation of similar organizations around the South; *Southern Enterprize*, 3.

[15] "Evangelical leaders knew that the young held the power to shape the religious future of the South and its western country, regions where half the population was under the age of sixteen," notes Christine Leigh Heyrman in *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 81. Not only were children a primary target of voluntary efforts, they were a common subject of evangelical literature, most notably juvenile religious prodigies or "young gifts" to the spiritual community; *Ibid*., 78-86. Fred J. Hood notes that many of the voluntary societies encouraged by Presbyterians in the early nineteenth century targeted instruction, in particular the "gospelizing" of Indians, African Americans, and the poor; *Reformed America: The Middle and Southern States, 1783-1837* (University: The University of Alabama Press, 1980), 116-18.

[16] Christine Leigh Heyrman discusses at length the participation of women in many aspects of spiritual life; however, she overlooks the importance of female voluntary associations in the South, describing the joining together of evangelical women in the name of reform as a primarily Northern phenomenon. *Southern Cross*, 163-167, 191-94. In fact, Southern women energetically established voluntary associations. An example of the activity of one community in this region is discussed by Suzanne Lebsock *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: Norton, 1985), chap. 7.

awakening. In the case of Natchez, the Female Charitable Society appears to have been a key evangelical agent. Indeed, benevolent women in Natchez became missionaries in their own communities, using charitable activity to lure adults from indifference and rear the rising generation to grace. Prior to Reverend Smith's 1816 visit, women and children had dwelt in the margins of religious life, but within a few months they moved to a more central position. After all, what better way to promote piety and morality then the instruction of young people, who were naturally receptive to guidance? Who better to guide children in learning correct principles than women, their natural caretakers?[17]

Not only did the Female Charitable Society influence evangelicalism in Natchez, it transformed the way indigent children were handled. Since the creation of the Mississippi Territory in 1798, juvenile relief had been administered by a civil bureaucracy of appointed officials who were, of course, all men. In 1816, their wives, daughters, and other female relations created a voluntary, civic entity to assist poor children, an entity that was remarkably matriarchal in form. This is not to say that the ladies promoted an exclusively female milieu. In fact, the Female Charitable Society appealed to the support of gentlemen and also extended care to boys. But within the

[17] According to Phillip N. Mulder, "Mothers played a crucial role in the education of their children, from catechizing to setting pious examples." Indeed, religious instruction was seen to begin in the home with the assistance of primers such as "A Mother's Catechism." *A Controversial Spirit: Evangelical Awakenings in the South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 22-23. Ruth H. Bloch discusses the dominant conception of women as "moral mothers" in the early republic, situating that conception within religious and intellectual developments; *Gender and Morality in Anglo-American Culture, 1650-1800* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). Focusing on political influences in shaping views of women, Linda K. Kerber explores the growing trend at the turn of the nineteenth century of educating women to prepare them as mothers who were responsible for educating their young children; *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press,1980); New York: W.W. Norton, 1986), chap. 7, esp. 210-13, 228-31. See also Nancy Cott on "Domesticity" in *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), chap. 2.

Society, women served as the principal decision-makers and, as a result, a segment of the population became subordinated to female patronage and management.

If a "spirit of charity" roused the ladies of Natchez to action, a mind for administration guided their benevolent work, which both emerged from and helped further a flourishing evangelical movement. To fully understand the impact of that work on the community, it is important to situate the Female Charitable Society not simply within the context of religious awakening and women's activism but within the existing system of juvenile relief. Something about this system led the ladies to change their initial opinion and concur with a New England missionary that the poor children of Natchez were very much in need of assistance—and that women were the ones who should provide it.

The Civil System of Juvenile Relief

When Daniel Smith recommended that the ladies form a charitable society to educate and support Natchez's indigent young, the ladies "strenuously objected" on the grounds "that there was no necessity for such an institution." How could there be? Taxpayers had been supporting poor children since the creation of the Mississippi Territory nearly twenty years earlier. Even newcomers to Natchez would have taken the existence of juvenile relief for granted. Since the earliest days of colonial settlement, Anglo-American communities from Boston to Philadelphia to Charleston had dealt with

destitute children in roughly the same way—according to the system developed in England during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.[18]

Arriving in 1716, the French were the first Europeans to inhabit the region. Then in 1763 Natchez came under British rule and thereafter was settled primarily by Anglo-Americans. Many British customs of local governance persisted even when the community was absorbed into Spanish Louisiana in 1779. Custom became codified upon the transfer of Natchez to the United States and the creation of the Mississippi Territory in 1798.[19] Echoing their Tudor antecedents, territorial laws pertaining to relief established a system which designated the county as the basic unit of governmental

[18] Henry VIII is believed to have personally authored the first laws forwarding apprenticeship as the principal means of juvenile relief, laws which were codified under his successor in 1601. Commonly referred to as the Elizabethan Poor Law, *43 Eliz. c. 2* served as the foundation for poor relief in England for over two centuries. E. M. Leonard, *The Early History of English Poor Relief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900; reprint, New York: Barnes and Noble, 1965), 3-4; 54-56. See also Paul Slack, *The English Poor Law, 1531-1782* (London: MacMillan, 1990). Apprenticeship lay at the heart of English juvenile relief, which was adopted throughout British America, including Natchez. One of the most comprehensive works on the subject remains Olive Joyce Dunlop's *English Apprenticeship and Child Labour* (London, T. F. Unwin, 1912). On the adoption of English poor relief in America, see Marcus W. Jernegan, *Laboring and Dependent Classes in Colonial America, 1607-1783* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931); Robert Francis Seybolt, *English Apprenticeship and Child Labour* and *Apprenticeship and Apprenticeship Education in Colonial New England and New York* (New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1969); and Ian M. G. Quimby, *Apprenticeship in Colonial Philadelphia* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1985), a reprint of his 1963 M.A. thesis. Differences in administering relief to the indigent abounded not only among the American colonies but among communities with the same geographical region, as Charles R. Lee illustrates in "Public Poor Relief and the Massachusetts Community, 1620-1715" *The New England Quarterly* 55 (December 1982): 564-85. Richard S. Dunn discusses the relief of young English colonials in Barbados as early as the 1620s in *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1972), 52-53.

[19] For an excellent overview of Natchez history before the Civil War, see Clayton D. James, *Antebellum Natchez* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968). Robert V. Haynes provides one of the most detailed accounts of Natchez under British rule in *The Natchez District and the American Revolution* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1976). See also Ethan Allen Grant, "They Stayed On: The British Settler Community at Natchez, 1765-1800" (PhD diss., Auburn University, 1993). On imperial contests and colonial development in the Lower Mississippi Valley in the late eighteenth century, see the introduction in Margaret Fisher Dalrymple, ed., *The Merchant of Manchac: The Letterbooks of John Fitzpatrick 1768-1790* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978). This Irish merchant lived just south of Natchez, and his letters capture much about life and business in a fledgling Anglo-American community. J.F.H. Claiborne, *Mississippi as a Province, Territory and State*, vol. 1 (Jackson, MS: Power and Barksdale, 1880) is rich in local details and contains numerous transcripts of first-hand accounts.

administration.[20] As the seat of Adams County, Natchez served as the meeting place for the "orphan's court," the judicial entity that served as the principal legal forum for matters pertaining to probate and the rights of minors.[21]

As the name implies, the orphan's court specialized in cases of household disruption, for deceased persons often left behind children in their minority. Court records include numerous entries on the assignment of guardians to these minors, in many cases their own mothers. If the father survived there was no need to secure him guardianship over his sons and daughters, as his authority was understood. However, the court had to designate custodians for fatherless orphans under the age of fourteen. Minors above that "age of discretion," as it was known in legal parlance, could select their own.[22] In all cases, guardians entered into a bond that was proportional to the

[20] Today, this initial body of territorial law, adopted between 1798 to 1799, is known after the first governor, Winthrop Sargent. Under the Works Progress Administration, P.L. Rainwater compiled a complete transcript "Sargent's Code" as well as a brief historical introduction; reprinted in *The American Journal of Legal History* 11 (April 1967): 152-206 and *The American Journal of Legal History* 11 (July 1967): 282-346. Chapter 2 of the Mississippi territorial code established the county court system, but perhaps the most significant law in shaping the county as an administrative unit is was Chapter 15, which pertained to the collection of taxes; Rainwater, "Sargent's Code," (April 1967): 160-65, 198-204.

[21] Chapter 4 of the Mississippi territorial code established a court of probate, which dealt with assigning guardians to orphaned minors as well as to "idiots, lunatics, and other distracted persons." Rainwater, "Sargent's Code," (April 1967): 173-75. By April 1803, a separate orphan's court was established in the Mississippi Territory; Orphan's Court Minutebook I (April 1803 to January 1815), Adams County Chancery Court, Natchez, Mississippi (hereafter abbreviated to ACCC). William Wirt Blume discusses the establishment of the orphan's court in the Northwest Territory under then Acting Governor Winthrop Sargent, noting that a 1718 Pennsylvania law was used as a model; "Probate and Administration on the American Frontier: A Study of the Probate Records of Wayne County: Northwest Territory, 1796-1803; Indiana Territory, 1803-1805; Michigan Territory, 1805-1816," *Michigan Law Review* 58 (December 1959): 218. For a discussion of the English origins of this judicial body, see Charles Carlton, *The Court of Orphans* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1974).

[22] The concept of fourteen years of age as signaling sufficient mental competence to make certain adult decisions hails from English legal practice. The manual printed for Mississippi justices of the peace and other county officials refers to fourteen as a seminal age with respect to a number of legal transactions; Harry Toulmin, *The Magistrate's Assistant; Being an Alphabetical Illustration of Sundry Legal Principals and Usages, Accompanied with a Variety of Necessary Forms* (Natchez: Samuel Terrell, 1807), 135-36. The text for this manual was largely extracted from a popular English manual, which was modified and printed throughout the United States after Independence. One early example notes "the years of discretion"

children's estate as a measure of security, and the court supervised their administration.[23] For example, Elizabeth Burling, one of the founders of the Female Charitable Society, came before the orphan's court in 1812 to file a bond for $100,000 as a condition of guardianship over her four minor daughters. The death of Walter Burling had fractured the family order, and the law required third-party officials to act as head of the remaining household in order to protect the interests of his "infant" children. Until each came of age, Mrs. Burling was required to submit accounts to the executors of her late husband's estate of all expenditures pertaining to their upkeep, from school tuition to the purchase of gloves.[24]

Every three to four months, the justices of the orphan's court would convene in Adams County, and among the numerous matters of guardianship and probate were the cases of destitute children. Some appear to have been full orphans, that is, without either parent living. Yet several minors could still claim a mother living.[25] Usually, children were brought before the court by "overseers of the poor," appointed officials who were

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as being "the age of fourteen." James Parker, *The Conductor Generalis: or, the Office, Duty and Authority of Justices of the Peace…Also, the Office of Clerks of Assize, and of the Peace etc*. (Philadelphia: Robert Campbell, 1792), 237.

[23] Chapter 4 of the Mississippi territorial code outlines all procedures pertaining to probate; P.L. Rainwater, "Sargent's Code," *The American Journal of Legal History* 11 (April 1967): 173-75.

[24] Elizabeth Burling's guardianship appointment appears in the entry for October 31, 1812, Orphan's Court Minutebook I (April 1803 to January 1815), ACCC, 262. Accounts pertaining to the minor heirs of Walter Burling are found in the Burling Family Papers, 1810-1827, Natchez Trace Collection, Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin (hereafter cited as NTC). For a thorough discussion of laws respecting guardianship and custody of minors in the South, see Peter W. Bardaglio, *Reconstructing the Household: Families, Sex, and the Law in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992). See also Carole Shammas, *A History of Household Government in America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004) and Michael Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth: Law and the Family in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), especially chap. 7.

[25] See Orphan's Court Minutebooks I-III, which cover the years 1803 to 1824, ACCC. While the orphan's court dealt with cases of guardianship well into the nineteenth century, the last entry pertaining to a destitute minor bound out as an apprentice appears in 1821. There are several instances in which "orphaned" children were brought before the court by their own mothers.

charged with dispensing relief to indigent residents—white and black—as long as they were free and resided within the county. The law stipulated that indigent males and females below the ages of twenty-one and eighteen respectively were to be brought before the orphan's court justices, who then issued orders to bind them out as apprentices.[26]

Apprenticeship by indenture was the primary means of assisting poor and orphaned minors throughout British America and the only means specified by statute in Mississippi. From the organization of the territory in 1798 through 1816, the year the ladies of Natchez made their inquiry into the "state of the poor," forty boys and eleven girls were bound out by the Adams County orphan's court.[27] The youngest recorded apprentice during this period was an infant of twenty months, yet the average comes out to a little over ten years of age. Among the fifty-one minors bound out were five boys and girls classified as "mulatto" or "free negro of color." The absence of racial designations for the others implies that they were white. While the race of those who

[26] Contrary to the broad scope suggested by its title, Chapter 36, "A Law Pertaining to the Binding of Apprentices," focuses solely on destitute minors and outlines the procedure for their relief. Rainwater, "Sargent's Code," (July 1967): 312-13. Not all ages of apprentices are recorded in the orphan's court minute books, but the oldest known minor bound out was seventeen years of age. There are instances of minors naming guardians before the orphan's court as old as age twenty, such as Addison Kennedy, who is referred to in the minutes as "an infant" in 1812; Orphan's Court Minutebook I (April 1803 to January 1815), ACCC, 213. It seems likely, however, that able paupers on the cusp of majority were dealt with outside the court or left to fend for themselves.

[27] From 1799 to 1803, apprentices were brought before the Court of the Quarter Sessions. Those records are found in Mississippi Historical Records Survey, *Transcription of County Archives of Mississippi, No. 2 Adams County*, vols. 1 and 2 (Jackson: n.p., 1942) as well as Orphan's Court Minutebooks I (April 1803 to January 1815) and II (February 1815 to January 1820), ACCC. Subsequent references to apprentices draw from these minutebooks. Another source of information pertaining to apprentices is the Deed Record Books A-LL, ACCC which contain transcriptions of indentures. Not all apprentices noted in the Orphan's Court Minutebooks appear in the Deed Record Books, which feature minors bound by overseers of the poor but not recorded as having appeared before orphan's court justices. Apart from three indentures, most entries in the Deed Record Books are dated from 1817, the year Mississippi attained statehood, with the last apprenticeship indenture dated 1858.

took on apprentices is unclear, most were probably white given the small population of free blacks in the county.[28]

The justices of the orphan's court were authorized to bind out children to anyone "reputable and discreet, who may be willing to take them."[29] In practice, "willingness" probably depended on a need for labor. When specified in the records, the kind of work undertaken by apprentices was determined by gender: boys were bound to carpenters, saddlers, bakers, tailors, tanners, and shoemakers while girls were apprenticed primarily as housekeepers and seamstresses. Though vocational training appears to have been stratified according to gender, there was some crossover with respect to placement. A few male apprentices were bound to women, and a few girls were placed with men. In these cases, the minors were apparently not expected to learn the trade of their master or mistress but to labor in a capacity befitting their sex and to receive care in return.[30]

All apprentices were assured the same contractual provisions of basic support and education as outlined in the territorial statute, and the arrangement could be quite profitable for adults.[31] In exchange for room, board, clothing, a bit of schooling, and "freedom dues" at the end of the contracted term, apprenticeship potentially guaranteed a source of labor for a number of years. Indentures usually stipulated that the bound minor would learn the secrets of some "art and mystery," with the understanding that they

[28] No free blacks are recorded in the 1820 census, though the appearance of free children of color in the orphan's court suggests their presence. In 1840, 283 free people of color are recorded for Adams County; James, *Antebellum Natchez*, 163.
[29] From chapter 36 of the territorial code; Rainwater, "Sargent's Code," (July 1967): 312.
[30] In the available records, trades are not always specified for apprentices and masters and mistresses are not always named.
[31] Rainwater, "Sargent's Code," (July 1967): 312. These statutory provisions will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 4.

would one day become masters and mistresses themselves. However, less than half of the children apprenticed by the orphan's court had trades specified, so they may have been placed more as menial workers than artisans-in-training. Given the steady decline of workshop modes of production in the nineteenth century, it is entirely possible that even those minors bound to particular crafts found themselves laboring toward a permanent journeyman (i.e., wage-earning) status.[32] Not only were overseers of the poor acting as intermediaries of relief, they were also serving as labor brokers in their communities, sometimes for their own benefit. At least three overseers had taken apprentices by 1816, and the practice only increased thereafter.[33]

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[32] The decline of artisanal apprenticeship after the American Revolution has been examined by many scholars. In particular, see W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Craft Apprentice from Franklin to the Machine Age in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). Bernard Bailyn details his theory that apprenticeship declined as a result of the breakdown of the traditional family, namely the collapse of patriarchal authority in the eighteenth century and the consequent rise of filial independence; *Education in the Forming of American Society: Needs and Opportunities for Study* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960). Quimby supports Bailyn's theory, yet attributes the decline more to "the process of modernization" and the destructive force of rationalizing human activity, and he cautions against American exceptionalism, noting for example that apprenticeship began its decline in England much earlier, during the mid-seventeenth century; *Apprenticeship in Colonial Philadelphia*, 3-4, 140-56. Karin L. Zipf notes that apprenticeship for paupers, especially children of color, remained on the books for poor minors in North Carolina until the state Child Welfare Reform Act was passed in 1919; *Labor of Innocents: Forced Apprenticeship in North Carolina, 1715-1919* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005). The continuation of apprenticeship in Adams County, Mississippi for certain classes of minors will be discussed in a later chapter. On the general deterioration of workshop modes of production in the wake of industrialization, the literature is vast. Gary J. Kornblith provides a concise yet rich historiographical overview in "The Artisanal Response to the Capitalist Transformation," *Journal of the Early American Republic* 10 (Autumn, 1990): 315-21 as does Richard Stott in "Artisans and Capitalist Development," *Journal of the Early American Republic* 16 (Summer, 1996): 257-71. Of the numerous monographs that have emerged in the past thirty years, most continue in the tradition of Alan Dawley's seminal *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976) by focusing their historical studies on a particular urban area. See also Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and The Rise of the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984) and Susan E. Hirsch, *Roots of the American Working Class: The Industrialization of Crafts in Newark, 1800-1860* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978). For a more geographically comprehensive overview, see Walter Licht, *Industrializing America: The Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

[33] In 1801, Elizabeth Shuts was bound to overseer of the poor Sam Timberlake, and in 1816, George and James, both identified as "mulatto" were bound to John Steele. Mississippi Historical Records Survey,

Despite the territorial mandate of apprenticeship for indigent minors, juvenile relief in Natchez retained elements of *ad hoc* administration under Spanish rule, in particular the practice of informal placement.[34] At least seven children were bound out in 1801, yet Molly Liphart petitioned the court for $100 as reimbursement for the trouble of raising an orphan boy for the past two years, with no mention of having taken him as an apprentice.[35] While territorial law said nothing about poor children living with caretakers outside the bonds of indentures, this parallel practice seems to have been quite common, even something of a cottage industry. Housing someone who was destitute, lame, or otherwise incapable of self-support could fetch as much as $10 per month. While most of the reimbursement vouchers issued to caretakers by the county are vague about the recipient of care, a few minors are identified. Cynthia Williams is a case in point. In 1809, William Henry King boarded the girl for half a year and received $8 per month, along with an additional allowance of $4 for her clothing. Cynthia was then placed with Mary Hustler, who kept her for the whole of 1810 yet received only $5 per month in

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Transcription of County Archives of Mississippi, No. 2 Adams County, vol. 1 (Jackson: 1942) and Orphan's Court Minutebook II (February 1815 to January 1820), ACCC, 68.

[34] Even after Spain wrested Natchez from British control in 1779, the predominately Anglo-American populace was granted unusual tolerance toward their language as well as their legal and civil institutions, including apprenticeship. The tolerance may have resulted from the desire of Spanish authorities to encourage white settlement in Mississippi as well as the English education of the longest serving governor. See Jack D. L. Holmes "Law and Order in Spanish Natchez, 1781-1798," 25 *Journal of Mississippi History* (Fall 1963): 187, 190-91; Jack D. L. Holmes, *Gayoso: The Life of a Spanish Governor in the Mississippi Valley*, 1789-1799 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 4; and James, *Antebellum Natchez*, 40-41. While some poor and orphaned children were bound out as apprentices by the authority of the governor, many (if not most) appear to have been placed informally with local caretakers without the government intervention. The records of official transactions conducted during the Spanish provincial period (1779-1798) were translated in 1817, and subsequently some of the original documents were dispersed. A transcription of the 1817 translation appears in May Wilson McBee, comp., *The Natchez Court Records, 1767-1805: Abstracts of Early Records*, vol. 1, (Greenville, MS: 1954).

[35] Mississippi Historical Records Survey, *Transcription of County Archives of Mississippi, No. 2 Adams County*, vol. 1 (Jackson: 1942). Of the seven minors bound as apprentices only one indenture, that of four-year-old Mary Eveson, appears in the deed records; Deed Record Book B, ACCC, 266-67.

compensation.[36] Cynthia Williams then disappears from the record until July 1814 when she was brought before the orphan's court by an overseer of the poor and subsequently ordered bound as an apprentice.[37] Her delay in following the course stipulated by statute may have resulted from an initial dearth of masters and mistresses—that is, someone willing to assume responsibility *in loco parentis* over a free minor until he or she attained the age of majority.

It is difficult to say how many children were serving as apprentices when the ladies made their inquiry in the spring of 1816, for the records are muddled to say the least.[38] There are indications that some apprentices were simply cast off despite the contractual bonds that linked them with masters and mistress until the term expired.[39] Unfortunately, gaps in the surviving documentary evidence make it impossible to determine how many individuals Adams County was supporting and at what cost.[40] If

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[36] Adams County vouchers for the years 1809 to 1811, Auditor's Records, Natchez Historical Society Collection, Mississippi Department of Archives and History (hereafter cited as MDAH). Daniel C. Vogt discusses at length the business of paid caretakers in "Poor Relief in Frontier Mississippi, 1798-1832," *Journal of Mississippi History* 51 (1989): 181-199; he mentions the vouchers pertaining to Cynthia Williams on 186-87.

[37] Cynthia was bound to an unnamed individual until the age of sixteen. Orphan's Court Minutebook I (April 1803 to January 1815), ACCC, 337-38.

[38] Orders for binding out apprentices appear in the records of the General Court of Quarter Sessions and, from 1803 onward, in the minutes of the Adams County orphan's court as well as the deed records. To complicate matters even further, there is at least one apprentice who figures in a court case in 1811 with several copies of his indentures, yet no record of him exists in any of the aforementioned sources. Either some apprenticeships were arranged without the intervention of civil authorities, or the county clerk was remiss in keeping track of these transactions.

[39] For example, Thomas Mason was bound by the overseers of the poor to an unspecified person in 1813, then bound to John Lape, a baker, in 1814. Mason was then bound to another unspecified person in 1815, at which time he was approximately nine years old. There are instances of indentures being revoked or modified for other apprentices, but none are recorded for Thomas Mason. Orphan's Court Minutebook I (April 1803 to January 1815), ACCC, 38, .

[40] An account presented to the Court of Quarter Sessions in May 1801 lists $400 for "Paupers expences," which accounted for almost 10% of funds spent over the previous year; Mississippi Historical Records Survey, *Transcription of County Archives of Mississippi*. Daniel C. Vogt discusses the problem of evidence, noting that while records survive for the years 1803 onward there are many gaps. He determined that Adams County auditor records reveal an average of 12% of total expenditures devoted to poor relief

the number or condition of boys and girls living in indigence had been perceived as alarming, it is possible that the ladies would have noticed and taken action before Daniel Smith raised the issue of "the state of the poor." The idea to provide poor children what was already promised by law—support and education—may have prompted initial resistance, but upon closer inspection the women found those provisions to be inadequate.

For starters, statutory relief did not specify religious and moral instruction, one of the primary aims of missionaries like Daniel Smith and the hobby-horse of evangelicals in general. In theory, apprentices learned the rudiments, usually at night school so as not to interfere with the day's labor. And from the master or mistress, they learned how to behave as a good worker should. Though children in the care of paid individuals were not guaranteed schooling (or anything else), some form of education and moral guidance was probably presumed. In the case of Cynthia Williams, it seems that she received little or none, for the orphan's court justices stated that this "infant or orphan wants protection to bring it up in honest and virtuous ways."[41] Outdoor relief—placing children in homes as opposed to gathering them into a central residential facility—was designed to mimic the normative household, whereby the head reared the young to virtue and industry. However, children living with adults who did not emphasize piety or learning probably did without, as Adams County had few churches and even fewer schools. Most of these

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for the years 1809 to 1811; "Poor Relief in Frontier Mississippi, 1798-1832," 185-86. James notes that nearly one-third of expenditures by the city of Natchez from 1803 to 1817 went to the "sick poor," probably at the hospital, but there is no mention of supporting able-bodied indigent minors; *Antebellum Natchez*, 84.

[41] Orphan's Court Minutebook I (April 1803 to January 1815), ACCC, 337.

institutions were concentrated in Natchez, and accessing them was logistically and financially out of reach for many Mississippians.[42]

Children who lived in Natchez "Under-the-Hill," or within walking distance of it, were subject to another kind of education. The area situated on the eastern edge of the Mississippi River became the town center under British provincial rule, but by the end of the eighteenth century polite inhabitants had established themselves on the bluff that towered three hundred feet above.[43] Not only were these inhabitants seeking out healthier breezes; they were escaping an infestation of depravity. Visitors who traveled to Natchez by water in the early nineteenth century disembarked at Natchez Under-the-Hill, and they had little good to say about the place:

> "For the size of it, there is not, perhaps, in the world a more dissipated place."[44]
>
> "It is perhaps one of the most wretched places in the world."[45]
>
> "The resort of dissipation. Here is the bold-faced strumpet, full of blasphemies, who looks upon the virtuous part of her sex with contempt and hatred; every house is a grocery, containing gambling, music, and dancing, fornicators, etc."[46]

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[42] The emergence of schools in the Mississippi Territory is discussed in chapter 3.

[43] By 1776, population growth had spurred the governor of West Florida, of which Natchez was a part, to order the laying out of a town on the riverbank, situated below the old French fort. Relocating the center of commercial activity reflected a declining reliance on trade with Indians and the rising importance of staple agriculture. While the port would never exceed New Orleans in size or economic stature, Natchez Under-the-Hill would eventually become distinguished for the scale of its dissipation. James, *Antebellum Natchez*, 18-20. Robert V. Haynes provides one of the most detailed accounts of British Natchez, from 1763 to the failed rebellion of 1781 in *The Natchez District and the American Revolution* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1976). For an especially colorful depiction of the early raucous history of this notorious riverfront, see Edith Wyatt Moore, *Natchez Under-the-Hill* (Natchez: Southern Historical Publications, 1958).

[44] John Bradbury, *Travels in the Interior of America* (London: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1819) in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846*, vol. 5 (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1904), 211.

[45] Estwick Evans, *A Pedestrious Tour* (Concord, NH: Joseph Spear, 1819) in Thwaites, *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846*, vol. 8, 319.

[46] From an 1816 account written by traveler Henry Ker, quoted in James, *Antebellum Natchez*, 169.

"A repulsive place, the centre of all that is vile."[47]

"A vile hole."[48]

Another visitor remarked more specifically on the denizens of this notorious port: "fashionably dressed young men, smoking or lounging, tawdrily arrayed, highly rouged females, sailors, Kentucky boatmen, negroes, mulatoes, pigs, dogs, and dirty children."[49] The last group must have been especially worrying to anyone concerned about the rehabilitation of the riverside and the moral direction of the community as a whole, for children would doubtless follow wherever the motley assemblage of adults led them.

Those who dared to ascend the bluff found a more pleasing prospect: a town neatly laid out on a grid with several stylish houses, although the streets were uneven and unpaved and livestock were commonly seen roaming about. The well-heeled inhabitants of Natchez "On-the-Hill" were full aware of what lurked below, but the tremendous commercial activity along the docks rendered the section a necessary evil. Goods arrived daily from up north while vast quantities of staple crops were carried down the Mississippi and beyond, and after Nicholas Roosevelt piloted the first steamboat in

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[47] Timothy Flint, *Recollections of the Last Ten Years in the Valley of the Mississippi*, George R. Brooks, ed., (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968), 213; a reprint of the original 1826 edition.

[48] Quoted in Edward C. Carter II, John C. Van Horne, and Charles E. Brownell eds., *Latrobe's View of America, 1795-1820: Selections from the Watercolors and Sketches* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 356. The Latrobes apparently remained only a day in Natchez and visited a friend who lived in the upper section of town, finding her well-appointed home a great contrast to the squalor below. Their trip is described in Talbot Hamlin, *Benjamin Henry Latrobe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 524-525.

[49] Quoted in William C. Davis, *A Way Through the Wilderness: The Natchez Trace and the Civilization of the Southern Frontier* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 154.

western waters to Natchez in 1811, the river nearly choked with commercial traffic.[50] Despite the enactment of laws against blasphemy and intemperance and "the evil practice of gaming,"[51] city fathers were reluctant to crack down on the dockside where their fortunes were being made. But if the rising generation could be taught to abhor vicious practices and embrace religion and virtue, then perhaps Natchez Under-the-Hill would eventually cleanse itself.

Cultivating children took time and scrupulous attention, but the gentlemen who served as overseers of the poor—that is, planters, attorneys, and other members of "the better sort"—were not required by law to inspect the progress of minors once they had been placed out.[52] Indeed, there is no evidence that they did so. The onus was on the apprentice to ensure compliance. Mississippi law allowed apprentices or their advocates to bring complaints against masters and mistresses and petition for removal, though only one complaint was made before 1816, which was subsequently dismissed.[53] In this case,

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[50] See J.F.H. Claiborne, *Mississippi as a Province, Territory and State*, vol. 1 (Jackson, MS: Power and Barksdale, 1880), 537-45.

[51] Henry Toulmin, *The Magistrate's Assistant,* 111.

[52] Chapter 14 of the Mississippi territorial statutes created the office of "overseer of the poor," whose duties involved the following: "to take notice of all the poor and distressed families, and persons residing in his proper township; and enquire into the means by which they are supported, and maintained. And whenever he shall discover any person, or family, realy suffering through poverty, sickness, accident, or any misfortune, or inability, which may render him, her or them, a wretched and proper object of public charity; it shall be his duty…to give immediate information thereof, to a justice of the peace, acting in and for the same county, that legal means may be taken by such justice, to afford the person or persons so suffering, proper and seasonable relief." Rainwater, "Sargent's Code," (April 1967): 198. Overseers of the poor drew from the more prominent and established citizens of the territory. Among the first to be appointed was a former *alcalde* under Spanish provincial rule, and officials appointed in the territorial period included planters, merchants, as well as some in trades, such as printing. Provincial and Territorial Documents, 1759-1813, NTC; Orphan's Court Minutebooks I-III, ACCC. Daniel C. Vogt examines the overseers of the poor in Adams County from 1818 to 1821 and notes that the majority were substantial owners of land and slaves; "Poor Relief in Frontier Mississippi, 1798-1832," 194-96.

[53] The relevant portion of Chapter 36 reads: "It shall be lawful for the Court of Quarter sessions, upon the complaint of the overseers of the poor, or of any apprentice, by themselves or friends, against their masters or mistresses, to hear and determine; and if it shall appear to the satisfaction of the court, that such

either the apprentice's charge was found to be baseless or the justices did not wish to rule against such a prominent master as Winthrop Sargent, the former territorial governor.[54] The absence of complaints does not necessarily indicate that all was well with the institution of apprenticeship in Adams County. Doubtless there were many infractions that went unreported or unheeded. While overseers of the poor had the authority to remove children from parents and relations deemed unfit to care for them properly, that authority had yet to be exercised by 1816—a wonder in a place as nefarious as Natchez.

A remnant of baronial patronage, the system of relief established by law upon the creation of the Mississippi Territory was thoroughly patriarchal in form and also mirrored household government of the colonial period.[55] At the head of the community household were prominent men who oversaw the welfare of indigent minors and dispensed assistance, usually by binding them out as apprentices, but always holding the right to supersede or even terminate the authority of masters and mistresses. The laws pertaining to relief were drafted as perfunctorily as those pertaining the formation of a militia, the construction of jails, and the improvement of roads—a matter of course for an Anglo-American settlement. To be sure, relief was regarded not as a privilege but the *right* of free county residents as well as the *responsibility* of taxpayers. Charity had little, if anything, to do with it.

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complaint be well founded, and of sufficient magnitude to make removal necessary; the court shall have power to remove such apprentice, and bind him, or her, to such other person as they think proper." Rainwater, "Sargent's Code," (July 1967): 312-13.

[54] In 1802, apprentice John Blumon brought a charge against his master, Winthrop Sargent. After postponing the case once, the court finally dismissed it altogether deciding that the matter did "not come properly before them." Mississippi Historical Records Survey, *Transcription of County Archives of Mississippi, No. 2 Adams County*, vol. 2 (Jackson: n.p., 1942), 18, 45, 58.

[55] See Shammas, *A History of Household Government in America*, especially chapters 1 and 2.

Female Government

By contrast, the women who formed a society on behalf of poor children in 1816 stated charity as their main purpose. The religious revival pervading the community and the nation led women to pursue active Christianity and help those they perceived as the most vulnerable inhabitants. Because there was no place for benevolent women—or charity—in the patriarchal system of relief, they created one of their own.

"A number of ladies" met for the first time on March 12, 1816 at the elegant federal-style town residence of Maria Vidal Davis, the daughter of a former Spanish consul and the wife of the first planter in Natchez to ship his cotton via steamboat.[56] Precisely who attended the inaugural meeting of the new society is unclear as only those elected to serve as officers were recorded in the minutes. A list of initial subscribers at the beginning of the minutebook abounds with esteemed personages—many of them intricately interrelated—who might have been there: Victoire Benoist Shields, the wife of the first justice of the Mississippi Supreme Court; Mary McIntosh Williams Sargent, wife of the first territorial governor; Elizabeth Overaker Tichenor, married to the cashier of the Bank of Mississippi; Eliza Baker Turner, married to a prosperous attorney who also served as a civil and territorial official; and Ann Dunbar Postlethwaite, the wife of a

[56] March 12, 1816, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR. All subsequent references to this first meeting and the constitution that was drafted then are drawn from this entry. In his famed diary, William Johnson named Samuel Davis as one of the "wealthy and inteligent part of this community" in a list of the nabobs of Natchez which included several other male relations of the Female Charitable Society founders; William Ransom Hogan and Edwin Adams Davis, eds., *William Johnson's Natchez: The Diary of a Free Negro* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 209-10.

prosperous merchant as well as the daughter of a famous local planter and member of the American Philosophical Society.[57]

Distinguished primarily for their male connections, genteel women in the early republic were not usually named in public except through marriage announcements and obituaries, and even in these notices patriarchal ties are reinforced. Of course, ladies were publicly celebrated in July 4th toasts to "the American fair" as well as for their other contributions to the festive day. A newspaper account in 1813 describes an Independence Day dinner attended by Mississippi territorial officials featuring a "fare that was entirely American…tastily prepared and elegantly arranged by the matrons of each family."[58] Left unsaid is the likelihood that enslaved women had actually prepared and served the meal, but credit for domestic accomplishments in the antebellum South was given to the "lady" of the house.

In Natchez, these ladies cultivated considerable managerial skills as most also assisted with the running of plantations, including the supervision of anywhere from a few to several hundred enslaved laborers, In addition to helping with or, in some cases, administering single-handedly daily business operations, planter women were responsible for a number of "maternal" duties with respect to their slaves, such as making clothes and

[57] Information regarding key personages in Natchez drawn primarily from Claiborne, *Mississippi as a Province, Territory and State*, vol. 1. Family connections pieced together with the assistance of marriage and death records and other genealogical resources pertaining to Mississippi found in the Tyrrell Historical Library, Beaumont.
[58] *Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer*, July 14, 1813.

nursing the sick, duties which mistresses carried out for their own children as well.[59] Founding a voluntary society may have seemed a minor endeavor by comparison.

The women who organized the Natchez Female Charitable Society were not starting their enterprise from scratch. In the minutes of the first meeting, there is mention that the members "read and considered some Sketches of a Constitution."[60] Samuel Mills, the Presbyterian missionary who had helped organize the Mississippi Bible Society in 1813, had brought constitutions of other voluntary associations with him to serve as models for pious gentlemen.[61] Daniel Smith may have brought some with him as well in 1816, or perhaps the women had picked up copies from friends and relations in the East. Ladies there had been forming charitable associations since the 1790s, and given the deep connection with the Atlantic states, it is likely that some of those constitutions made their way to the Lower Mississippi Valley.[62] Indeed, an examination of the organizational structure of the Natchez Female Charitable Society reveals an institutional genealogy and connection with similar societies around the country. The women of Natchez were aligning their charitable impulses with those of benevolent women elsewhere. A brief

[59] On the day to day administrative demands faced by women of the "planter" class, see Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984); Marli Francis Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-1860* (University of Illinois Press, 1997); and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (University of North Carolina Press, 1988).
[60] March 12, 1816, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[61] *Connecticut Evangelical Magazine and Religious Intelligencer*, 6:7 (July 1813): 268.
[62] In 1797, Isabella Marshall Graham along with her daughter and several ladies of note (Elizabeth Seton and Eliza Hamilton, wife of Alexander Hamilton, among them) founded in New York the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children, which is widely regarded by historians as the first nonsectarian charitable association established and run by women in the United States. Anne M. Boylan examines this association at great length in *The Origins of Women's Activism*. For additional biographical information regarding Mrs. Graham, as well as letters that detail the religious impulses behind her charitable work, see Joanna Bethune, comp., *The Power of Faith, Exemplified in the Life and Writings of the Late Mrs. Isabella Graham*, new ed., (New York: American Tract Society, 1843).

overview of their society with comparisons to analogous associations will help situate their work and highlight its contemporary impact, namely the creation of a system of governance that was primarily female in form.[63] Although the community was dominated by a patriarchal order, the members of the Female Charitable Society constructed a concurrent matriarchal system to govern themselves, the adults in their employ, and the children under their care.[64]

Of course, the ladies could have foregone the voluntary association altogether and assisted poor children as individuals, a suitably feminine approach. Yet Reverend Smith

[63] Among historians who study the rise of female voluntary associations at the turn of the nineteenth century, there has been much discussion about whether such activity was regarded as consistent with or deviant from contemporary gender mores. As discussed earlier, most of these studies focus on charitable activity in the northeast, yet Suzanne Lebsock shows how Southern "ladies" were able to weave organized benevolence into accepted notions of white womanhood; *The Free Women of Petersburg*, chap. 7. Similar to what was occurring in Northern communities, as Nancy A. Hewitt has shown, associational charity could be deemed as an appropriate component of "woman's sphere"; *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984). Anne M. Boylan has shown how antebellum organized benevolence helped define the gender system of that era, though she characterizes that system "by an ideology stressing feminine and masculine spheres and distinguishing sharply between the 'public' and the 'private.'" *The Origins of Women's Activism*, 5. This study proposes that those lines may not be as sharp as previously supposed, that organizational systems developed by benevolent women created a sphere of civic domesticity that enabled a more fluid interchange of "public" and "private" as well as "feminine" and "masculine" activity.

[64] Discussions of "matriarchy" have heretofore surfaced primarily in anthropological studies of "primitive" societies as well as research on African American families in addition to literary applications, such as biblical and mythological analyses. It is interesting to note that while the concept of "patriarchy" frequently appears as an analytical device in historical studies of early America, the term "matriarchy" is almost nowhere to be seen. To illustrate, a search of recent monographs yielded no instance of "matriarchy" in the title whereas "patriarchy" turns up in several works, such as Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Mark E. Kann, *The Gendering of American Politics: Founding Mothers, Founding Fathers, and Political Patriarchy* (Westport: Praeger, 1999); Pauline E. Schloesser, *The Fair Sex: White Women and Racial Patriarchy in the Early American Republic* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); Mark E. Kann, *Punishment, Prisons, and Patriarchy: Liberty and Power in the Early American Republic* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); and Markus Dirk Dubber, *The Police Power: Patriarchy and the Foundations of American Government* (New York : Columbia University Press, 2005). Within more general, recent texts, early American women are often referred to as "Republican Mothers" but almost never as "matriarchs" even though men are often depicted as "patriarchs." While this dissertation does not aim to establish "matriarchy" as the preferred analytical construct for elite females in early America, it seeks to point out how women involved with organized benevolence created a hierarchal system of governance for themselves as well as recipients of their charity.

never said a word about acting as individuals. When the women came around to the idea of charity, they likewise never seem to have questioned the necessity of forming a society. As evangelicals had shown, joining together amplified activity. And organizations based on written charters were far more effective at furthering aims, both in the ordering of benevolent work and the ease of reproducing that work in other communities. For women, constitutions had the added advantage of demonstrating the seriousness of their purpose and dispelling the notion that members were gathering merely for tea and a chat.[65]

"This Society shall be called the Female Charitable Society," reads article one, the briefest passage in the constitution and one of the most deceptively complex. Not only did this name make clear that the women were acting as a collective, it proclaimed that they were engaging in something more than casual altruism. In establishing a society they were forming a permanent, self-sustaining institution for the ordering of benevolence and the dispensation of relief. The particular name "Female Charitable Society" may have also lent their new venture some immediate credibility, for it had been previously adopted by benevolent women in Guilford, Connecticut; Newbern, North Carolina; Norfolk, Virginia; Canandaigua, New York; as well as Salem and Newburyport in Massachusetts. The women of Natchez could have also achieved recognition by calling themselves the "Charitable Female Society" (Pepperrell, Massachusetts), "Female Benevolent Society" (Wilmington, Delaware), "Female Beneficent Society" (Hartford,

[65] As Lori Ginzberg deftly demonstrates, early nineteenth-century female benevolence was a business, employing nearly all the organizational mechanisms employed by male associations; *Women and the Work of Benevolence*, 36-66.

Connecticut), or "Female Humane Association" (Richmond, Virginia) or a number of other names common to ladies' voluntary organizations of the time.[66] Despite these variations, societies almost universally included a reference to gender to distinguish their associations from those founded by men. The term "female" also served an exclusionary function. In fact, some societies specifically prohibited "the gentlemen" from joining. While the Natchez ladies included no such clause, they never seem to have admitted a man as a member.[67] This exclusion was consistent with polite notions of propriety, but it also served a practical function. If men were members, the ladies would necessarily have

[66] Timothy P. Gillet, *Charity Profitable, or, God a Surety for the Poor: A Sermon Delivered Before the Female Charitable Society in Guilford, January 6, 1813* (New Haven: Oliver Steele, 1813); *The Constitution of the Female Charitable Society of the Town of Canandaigua, Formed July 17, 1815* (Canandaigua: John A. Stevens, 1815); Lucius Bolles, *A Discourse Delivered Before the Members of the Salem Female Charitable Society, September 27, 1810, Being Their Tenth Anniversary* (Salem: Thomas C. Cushing, 1810); and Daniel Dana, *Discourse Delivered May 22, 1804, Before the Members of the Female Charitable Society of Newburyport, Organized June 8, 1803* (Newburyport: Edmund M. Blunt, 1804). An association named "Charitable Female Society" was organized in Pepperell, Massachusetts; John Bullard, *A Discourse, Delivered at Pepperell, September 19, 1815, Before the Charitable Female Society in That Town, and Published at Their Request* (Amherst, NH: R. Boylston, 1815). Nathan Strong, *The Character of a Virtuous and Good Woman, A Discourse, Delivered by the Desire and in the Presence of The Female Beneficent Society, in Hartford, October 4, 1809* (Hartford: Hudson and Godwin, 1809). Of similar name to the "first" female association founded in New York in 1797, the women of Philadelphia organized the "Female Association for the Relief of Women and Children in Reduced Circumstances"; *Constitution of the Female Association of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: n.p., 1801). Organizations named "Female Charitable Society" were later established in Washington, District of Columbia (1819); Wilmington, Delaware (1824); Charleston (of Charleston Neck), South Carolina (1835); and one also designated as "Catholic" in Mobile, Alabama (1835). Associations founded in Southern states, such as the ones established in Newbern and Norfolk, appear in the Southern Charities Project, a comprehensive online database of benevolent organizations established by women in the southern states, compiled by Timothy J. Lockley of the University of Warwick; see http://www.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/SouthernCharitiesProject/index.htm. A national database has yet to be developed.

[67] For example, the constitution of the Salem Female Charitable Society states: "The Gentlemen cannot be members of this Society; but all donations will be received with gratitude." *The Constitution of the Salem Female Charitable Society, Instituted July 1st, 1801* (Salem: William Carlton, 1801), 8. Though the offices of the Natchez Female Charitable Society resembled those of similar associations, the nature of membership differed. For example, a desire to practice charity was not enough to gain entry into the Boston Female Asylum Society—members were elected by ballot and a single nay vote would deny the candidate admission. The Natchez ladies do not state any exclusionary measures, perhaps because a dearth of participants was more the problem than a superabundance.

to defer to them. By keeping the organization entirely female, they could govern themselves far more freely.[68]

References to poor children in the Natchez Female Charitable Society constitution are brief and vague. In fact, the bulk of the charter is devoted to the establishment of a government, such as how often the members would convene and which offices would be created. The Society had as its chief officer a "president," a choice of title that was slightly unusual considering that benevolent women elsewhere seem to have preferred more conspicuously feminine titles. For example, the members of the Washington Orphan Asylum Society were typical in opting for a shared executive panel of three "directresses"—Dolley Madison was voted "First Directress" in 1815, and like her husband she later won reelection for a second term. For ladies to adopt the presidential model in Washington might have appeared presumptuous, even absurd, given that they met in the United States House of Representatives.[69]

Though politically disenfranchised, women involved in organized charity participated in the election of officers, who governed according to a hierarchical administrative structure. In the Natchez Female Charitable Society, the president chaired

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[68] Anne M. Boylan notes that when women's associations permitted "committees of gentlemen" to advise their affairs, the women "clearly subordinated their authority over financial and legal matters to the committees; when the gentlemen advisors came calling at meetings, they received a deferential reception." *The Origins of Women's Activism*, 89.

[69] *Report of the Washington Orphan Asylum Society: Instituted on the Tenth of October, 1815* (Washington: William A. Davis, 1817), 3. Catherine Allgor refers to Dolley Madison's involvement with the Society as an example of how the First Lady helped bridge the divide between the federal government and the city in *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), 97-98. The Chillicothe Female Benevolent Society and the Female Humane Association of Baltimore both referred to the executive office as "president." "Constitution of the Chillicothe Female Benevolent Society," printed in *The Weekly Recorder… Chillicothe* 2 (December 6, 1815): 149. *A Brief Account of the Female Humane Association Charity School, of the city of Baltimore* (Baltimore: Warner and Hanna, 1803).

the meetings and issued orders for financial disbursements; two vice presidents acted as managers and filled the top position as necessary; the secretary kept thorough records of all activities and issued regular reports; and the treasurer maintained an accurate account of donations and subscriptions. Next down were the managers, whose duties were "to provide an instructor and a school room, to search out needy Children, and to select the most deserving objects, to superintend their education, and to make such regulations for the government of the School as they may deem necessary." Below them were the members who, according to the constitution, could participate in any number of select committees formed by the managers to assist them with carrying out those duties.

After the description of the various elected offices came the Society's primary aim, which was stated simply as "to give instruction to poor children." Precisely what kind of instruction would be given is not delineated, yet from the preface and the duties outlined for managers in article six, it is clear that the women planned to create their own charity school. However, the members did not intend to serve as teachers, though they were perfectly capable of taking on such a task. Even those ladies who had been born before the Revolution and the ensuing expansion of female education would have been proficient in the rudiments, and many may have also been schooled in the liberal arts. For example, the artful handwriting of the recording secretary, her correct spelling, and her accurate figures all reflect years of tutelage, which was probably not exceptional

among her peers. And some members who were also young mothers were already schooling, at least partially, their own children.[70]

Unfortunately, personal records by the women involved in the Female Charitable Society are scant, yet among the papers of one early subscriber is a handwritten booklet which exemplifies the kind of instruction that mothers in the early republic—genteel mothers, in particular—administered to their children.[71] Entitled "As relating to Morals and Education—A Mother's advice to her Son," this booklet features a number of instructional essays, probably transcribed from other sources. Among them are "The Happiness of life depends on our conduct in the early stages of it," "Qualities most becoming in youth," and "Industry a duty of the Young." Deeply resonant of standard works of courtesy literature aimed at polite young readers, the essays also bear an unmistakably religious tenor, as evidenced by the author's opening admonition: "First, my beloved child, worship and adore God, think of him magnificently, speak of him

[70] Linda K. Kerber explores the "revolution" in female education toward the end of the eighteenth century, noting that the acquisition of knowledge became regarded as a vital duty for "Republican Mothers" for the cultivation of their sons and daughters as virtuous citizens. See, in particular, chapter 7 "'Why Should Girls be Learnd or Wise?': Education and Intellect in the Early Republic"; *Women of the Republic*, 189-231. The actions and writings of Judith Sargent Murray, sister of Mississippi's first territorial governor, have come to be seen as particularly illustrative of this emerging view toward women. For an insightful biographical account and selections of her writings, see Sharon M. Harris, ed., *Selected Writings of Judith Sargent Murray* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). See also Sheila L. Skemp, *Judith Sargent Murray: A Brief Biography with Documents* (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998).

[71] While there are numerous examples of fatherly admonitions—most notably the letters written by Lord Chesterfield to his son, which were widely and repeatedly published—there is also a rich history of "mother's advice" literature. Interestingly, one of the most popular such works was authored by a "fallen" mother: *An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to Her Absent Daughters* by Lady Sarah Pennington, which ran though numerous printings in England as well as in the United States. For more on this genre of conduct literature, see Susan C. Staub, comp., *Mother's Advice Books* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2000) and Marsha Urban, *Seventeenth-Century Mother's Advice Books* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

reverently, magnify his providence, adore his power, frequent his services, and pray to him constantly."[72]

Despite the capacity for and, indeed, the social expectation of educating young sons and daughters, the women of the Female Charitable Society constructed offices that were supervisory in nature. The hiring of an instructor may have been written into their charter from foresight of the tremendous labor involved in managing a charitable operation. Then again, members may have also harbored reservations about working so closely with the children of indigents, no matter how worthy.

While the majority of the constitution is devoted to outlining operational details in dry, administrative terms, the ending makes clear the evangelical impulses that drove those involved in the association: "With a humble reliance on the blessings of Him who is the inspirer of every benevolent feeling, the Subscribers embark in this enterprize of Charity. May it be the means of rescuing some youthful minds from the paths of ignorance and vice—May it cause some widow's heart to 'Sing for Joy.' They will be amply rewarded." Overseers of the poor might be saving children from total want, but benevolent women professed that they would rescue them from another kind of starvation: moral and spiritual neglect. Rather than something implicit or tangential, religion stood at the center of the program of relief as outlined by the Female Charitable Society, for those who received it as well as those who dispensed it, just as Reverend Smith had anticipated.

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[72] Though undated, this manuscript appears have been written for Abram Ellis from his mother Mary Ellis. His sister, Jane Ellis Rapalje, was involved with the Female Charitable Society from 1817 onward and later served as First Directress. This manuscript appears among papers from around 1818, including a subscription receipt for the Female Charitable Society. Ellis-Farar Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana (hereafter cited as LLMVC).

Aside from his panicky observations regarding the swift gains of Baptists and Methodists in Mississippi to the detriment of Presbyterians, Smith had nothing but praise for the Society, which was deliberately nonsectarian in composition. The lack of a particular affiliation is not mentioned in the constitution, yet female associations devoted to children generally avoided favoring one branch of Protestant Christianity over another. Cultivating religious principles among those who hitherto had had little to none was the first concern of evangelical missionaries and benevolent women.[73] As ever, association was the key to far-reaching influence. For Protestants to set aside doctrinal differences and work together to promote "hopeful conversions" would gather far more souls into the family of Christ than acting solely for denominational advancement.[74] Nevertheless, church attendance was an important step in achieving and maintaining a state of grace. Many of the women involved with the Natchez Female Charitable Society were also members of the Presbyterian church, to which Daniel Smith had been assigned, and they were likely the ones he first consulted about the pursuit of charity.[75] It would naturally follow, then, that Presbyterianism would be implicitly, if not explicitly, favored. Indeed,

[73] Lori D. Ginzberg notes that while some early female societies formed along denominational lines, most did not favor a particular sect with respect to membership or charitable work, resulting in "a network of nondenominational—not to say non-Protestant—organizations in cities and towns throughout the Northeast." *Women and the Work of Benevolence*, 38. This finding is supported in studies of Southern communities, such as Richmond, Virginia, where nonsectarian female charitable societies formed as early as 1805. Elna C. Green, *This Business of Relief*, 30.

[74] Missionaries like Daniel Smith were always on the lookout for evidence of grace. In his June 1816 letter to the Committee of Missions, Smith describes two particular instances of "hopeful conversion" in Natchez as a consequence of his visit; *Religious Remembrancer* 51(August 16, 1817): 201. Christine Leigh Heyrman argues the preoccupation with outward signs of transformative religiosity "unified all evangelicals in the early American South." *Southern Cross*, 4.

[75] From the church's founding in 1817, the list of members includes many women who served as officers of the Female Charitable Society, such as Miss Selah Henderson (Second Vice President, 1816), Mrs. Dana H. Pearse (Secretary, 1817), and Mrs. Ann D. Postlethwaite (First Directress, 1821). First Presbyterian Church Record Book, MDAH.

when the Society mandated church attendance, the children were not scattered among the various houses of worship but sent to Reverend Smith's congregation. Furthermore, the Presbyterian minister acted as a sort of chaplain to the Society, and he even married one of the officers.[76] Yet when it came to selecting an instructor for the children, the Society—at Daniel Smith's recommendation—hired a Baptist minister. Perhaps there were no Presbyterian schoolmasters available in the area. At any rate, the nonsectarian appearance of the charity broadened the appeal of the association and led to a greater pooling of philanthropic resources.[77]

If denominational competition was not the Female Charitable Society's aim, neither was conflict with territorial poor laws. Although the constitution makes no mention about the existing system of juvenile relief, article five suggests the intent to supplement rather than supplant assistance provided to indigent minors by the county. Instruction came first, and corporeal support for children and poor widows would be offered only as "surplus" funds allowed. Poor laws were not meeting the needs of the populace, so implies the Society's constitutional provision of support as a charitable aim, albeit a secondary one. Settlement, that is, documented residency within the county, was a stricture of statutory relief that the Society targeted. Article six stipulates that managers will limit their searches "to the city and its vicinity, but all needy objects from the Country who may apply for relief to this Society will be received." The difficulty and, in

[76] Daniel Smith married Ann E. Forman in 1817, who would late become treasurer of the Female Charitable Society.

[77] National evangelical organizations were heavily intertwined in pursuit of "common Christianity," according to John Q. Kuykendall. He notes that in many ways the administrative cooperation among them resembled "interlocking directorates" and together formed a "benevolent empire." *Southern Enterprize*, 4-9.

many cases, the danger of travel led Society members to narrow their geographical focus, yet they also proclaimed themselves a contact point for all "needy objects." Later on, members would actively broaden their scope, even across the state line, while territorial law continued to confine overseers of the poor to assisting only county residents.[78]

The only proscription included in the constitution was that charity would be offered "only to those of reputable Character," though "cases of extreme distress" would be considered. This exclusion was probably directed to the poor widows, who, unlike children, were presumed to have the capacity to distinguish right from wrong. Children had to be merely "deserving."[79] Adults, on the other hand, had to be respectable. The Society's aversion to assisting adults of bad moral character may have arisen from self-preservation more than sanctimony. Men serving as overseers of the poor could be fined for not carrying out their duties and taxpayers could be jailed for refusing to contribute their due to the county coffer, but voluntary associations relied entirely on the good will of members and the larger community.[80] Natchez Under-the-Hill was rife with needy children for the lady managers to search out, but for women to give the impression that they aided (and thus encouraged) wicked behavior would cast a pall over the Society and perhaps their own characters. Some women in other parts of the United States would

[78] This will be discussed in chapter 4.
[79] According to article six of the Female Charitable Constitution, managers were enjoined "to search out needy Children, and to select the most deserving objects." March 12, 1816, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[80] Chapter 14 of the Mississippi territorial code notes that the overseers of the poor are to be "entered and administered by the same authority; Rainwater, "Sargent's Code," (April 1967): 198. Though Chapter 29 targets specifically constables, the fines imposed on those "refusing to fill the office" probably applied to overseers of the poor as well; Rainwater, "Sargent's Code," (July 1967): 307.

form associations specifically to redeem fallen women.[81] In Natchez, however, assistance to wayward adults remained a male undertaking, first through county poor relief and then through the Society for the Suppression of Vice and Immorality, which was organized by a group of civic-minded men a couple of years after the Female Charitable Society was founded.[82]

Whether surplus or not, funds were expended by the Society for the support of a widow, her two children, and an unspecified number of other boys and girls immediately after the first meeting, a fact that Daniel Smith proudly recounted to the Presbyterian Board of Missions.[83] According to the Society's minutes, the widow was probably "Mrs. Floyd," who was "engaged to be a matron to the orphan children," the first of a long line of women to serve as hired caretaker. Despite the spiritual benefit of helping Mrs. Floyd, the officers never lost sight of the fact that she was also an employee. After a few months, they began to complain that her costs were "too expensive" and "too high," though she received little more for herself and several children than what caretakers received from the county for one individual.[84] While "matron" was a term of distinction for well-to-do women, such as those who "prepared" the July 4th feast, when applied to

[81] The earliest was the Magdalen Society founded in Philadelphia in 1800; *The Constitution of the Magdalen Society* (Philadelphia: Benjamin and Jacob Johnson, 1800). This association was organized by men, but in 1812, Isabella Graham helped launch a women's auxiliary for a similarly named society in New York. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism*, 112. See also Christine Stansell, *City of Women*, 135, 172. Lori D. Ginzberg notes that the involvement of ladies with redeeming their "fallen" sisters stepped up in the 1830s and 1840s as part of a broader "female moral reform movement." *Women and the Work of Benevolence,* 19.

[82] With the aim of putting an end to "sabbath breaking, profane swearing, gambling, drunkenness, indolence, dishonesty, and all such like evil practices, this society held its first meeting on December 7, 1818. Other than an introductory notice there appears to be little record of its activity. *Mississippi State Gazette*, January 20, 1819.

[83] *Religious Remembrancer* 51(August 16, 1817): 201.

[84] Entries for July 1, 1816 and August 7, 1816 respectively, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.

poor widows its meaning was far less exalted. Matrons are never referred to as "ladies" by the Society. Neither, so it seems, did they attend meetings. The wages and orders matrons received from the officers placed them in a separate, subordinate class.

The bottom of the hierarchy created by the Female Charitable Society was also the center of the benevolent project: the children themselves. Unfortunately, despite the constitutional provision that the secretary "shall keep a record of every Child educated by the Society, and age at entrance and the time of their discharge," the records are threadbare compared to those maintained by county officials. Only a few lists of children are included in the minutes along with periodic references to boys and girls as "objects of charity," often without any mention of name. The first list of children, drawn up a couple of months after the Society's founding, conveys the type of charitable recipients the ladies had in mind (the dates pertain to when the child was enrolled in school):

Nathan Thompson	11 yrs	entered	9th April
Wm Price	10	do	do / in May run away
Eliza Seamans	8	do	do
Selina E Floyd	9	do	26th
Cheslen do	8	do	26th
Daniel Griffin	7	do	26th
Matilda Wood		entered	1st May School
Washington White	26th April	do	1st May School
Stephen N. Wood			do 1st May School
Eliz.h ~~Long~~ Willcox		do	4th May School
Eliza ~~Long~~ Ellison		do	10th run away
Joel ~~Floyd~~ Landsdown		do	10
Sally Brush		do	10[85]

[85] Ibid., May 6, 1816. The abbreviation "do" stands for "ditto."

By May 1816, the members had under their "patronage" seven boys and six girls. At least two were the children of a poor widow, and some of the others may have been the charges of paid caretakers. This list includes one known apprentice, Elizabeth Willcox, who had been bound to a Mrs. Phelps the year before.[86] A later entry specifies that Elizabeth Willcox was around nine years old and that Washington White was six, the minimum eligible age for school, as resolved by the Society, and the only age restriction ever mentioned.[87]

It is clear that the Society did not seek out all minors. While the ladies would periodically assist infants, they primarily directed their care to children who were past the toddler years but had not yet reached puberty, the interval most receptive to instruction. The ages that are listed average to around eight years old, a couple of years younger than the average apprentice in Adams County.[88] Like the orphan's court, the Society took on sibling groups, reflective of the hardship that multiple children placed on poor parents and relatives. The list also discloses that female government was not infallible. Some children opted out of charity by running away, just as apprentices frequently absconded from their masters and mistresses.[89]

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[86] An order to have "Betsey Wilcox" bound to Mrs. Phelps during the October session in 1815. Orphan's Court Minutebook II (February 1815 to January 1820), ACCC, 38. Her age is listed as nine in the Female Charitable Society minutes December 2, 1816, NCHR.

[87] May 6, 1816, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.

[88] Among the available records pertaining to minors bound out during the territorial period (1798 to 1816), the ages of the apprentices are frequently omitted. Calculating those that are provided yields an average of 10.2 years. Compiled from data found in Mississippi Historical Records Survey, *Transcription of County Archives of Mississippi, No. 2 Adams County*; Adams County Orphan's Court Minutebooks I-II, ACCC and Deed Record Books B and F, ACCC.

[89] Even America's most famous apprentice, Benjamin Franklin, was a runaway. The "absconding" of bound youths was commonplace in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and Natchez newspapers periodically feature notices of runaway apprentices, a subject that will be examined in chapter 4.

While the civil system of juvenile relief targeted all free minors in the county, the Female Charitable Society focused on white, prepubescent children regardless of settlement. A few boys and girls are mentioned by first name only, in the way that overseers of the poor would refer to mulattos and other free children of color, yet the total absence of any racial designation suggests that the minors assisted by the Society were at least perceived to be white. Female associations founded by women usually targeted those of similar race.[90] However, benevolent women in Natchez were remarkably inclusive in one area: accepting boys as well as girls from the start.[91] Similar societies in the East generally restricted relief to females between the ages of three and ten, but the tendency was not simply a regional phenomenon. The Female Orphan Society of New Orleans, formed less than a year after the one in Natchez, stipulated that only "female orphan children" would receive assistance.[92]

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[90] Anne M. Boylan notes that even though northeastern societies founded by white, affluent, Protestant women in the early nineteenth century generally characterized themselves as "open," they tended to cater to those of similar race, class, and religion and target the "unfortunate" members of those same groups; *The Origins of Women's Activism*, 41. Suzanne Lebsock observes similar stratified tendencies in the South; *The Free Women of Petersburg*, 196-229, as does Elna P. Green *This Business of Relief*, 30. However, white women were not the only ones to engage in this practice. Anne Firor Scott points out that "free black women in New England and Pennsylvania were among the first to organize…mutual aid and self-education," and they did so for members of their race; *Natural Allies*, 13.

[91] For example, those in Boston, Providence, Portsmouth (New Hampshire), and Canandaigua specified "female children" and set an age range from about three to ten years of age. *The Constitution of the Providence Female Society for the Relief of Indigent Women and Children* (Providence: John Carter, 1801), 7. This group later became known as the Providence Female Charitable Society. Timothy Alden, *A Discourse, Delivered before the Members of the Portsmouth Female Asylum, at a Third Service on the Sabbath, 16 September, 1804. Prepared and Published at the Request of the Managers of this Benevolent Institution* (Portsmouth, NH: J. Melcher, 1804), 11. *The Constitution of the Female Charitable Society of Canandaigua, Formed July 17, 1815* (Canandaigua, NY: John A Stevens, 1815), 5.

[92] New York and Philadelphia were vague on their criteria, and the Salem Female Charitable Society listed "female orphans" in their constitution, printed a few years after their founding, but also included "Children from three to ten years of age" as potential recipients of relief. Lucius Bolles, *A Discourse Delivered Before the Members of the Salem Female Charitable Society, September 27, 1810, Being Their Tenth Anniversary* (Salem: Thomas C. Cushing, 1810), 11. In an early document, the name is listed as the "Female Charitable Society, though the constitution (dated January 21, 1817) and subsequent entries refer to the association as

From the beginning, the Natchez Female Charitable Society positioned itself as something more than a collection of altruistic ladies. It was, as the constitution states, an "enterprize." Before stepping outside Mrs. Davis's parlor, before helping a single poor child, the members formed a government to regulate their benevolent activities. From the charter to annual reports published in the newspaper to printed notecards requesting payment from subscribers—signed, incidentally, by treasurer Mrs. Daniel Smith—the Society gave every appearance of an official body. The key difference between the association and the civil bureaucracy established by territorial law to assist poor children lay in its charitable mandate. Operational funds were not collected by tax assessors who could throw property-holders in jail for refusal to pay. Instead, the Society had to rely on other tactics to coax dollars from inhabitants, who must have wondered, as the ladies themselves initially had, why such a charity was necessary. As benevolent women appealed for funds, they would show that sympathy could be very persuasive.

Conclusion

"The city of Natchez is perhaps as important a station for a missionary as any in the western or southern country."[93] In 1815, a pair of young Presbyterian missionaries ventured throughout the territories and made this pronouncement to their superiors back in New England. They found most Mississippians to be complete strangers to religion. And the few believers around were joining the Baptists and Methodists, who had long

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the "Female Orphan Society." Minutebook I (January 1817 to January 1823), Poydras Home Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University (hereafter cited as HTML).

[93] Mills and Smith, *Report of a Missionary Tour Through That Part of the United States Which Lies West of the Allegany Mountains*, 26.

established a presence there. When Daniel Smith returned to Natchez the following year, he knew that church alone would not bring light to "the dark valley of the Mississippi."[94] In accordance with the evangelical playbook, the minister promoted activities conducive to spiritual revival: visiting families in their homes, distributing bibles, starting a weekly prayer meeting, and launching a "monthly concert for prayer." At each of these gatherings, young people—females in particular—proved markedly receptive to his message.[95] As mothers, women would be perhaps the most potent influence in shaping young minds and leading them to hopeful conversions. Though Reverend Smith never said as much, it is clear that he regarded women, through their perceived natural maternal connection with children, as missionaries in that important station of the far southwest. Rather than approach the justices of orphan's court, the overseers of the poor, or other officials who were best situated to reform juvenile relief, he approached the ladies and suggested that they form a society to provide poor children what they were not receiving.

No documents have been found that disclose the private sentiments of those who established the Female Charitable Society and managed its business. Did they feel empowered by holding offices and conducting elections? Did they begin to desire the right to serve in public offices and vote in elections at the local, state, and national level? Without concrete evidence, one can only speculate. Given the burgeoning religious revival, Society members were likely acting out of a sense of Christian duty and noblesse oblige. Patriotism may have also prompted associational activity, for recently the United

[94] Ibid., 14.
[95] From Daniel Smith's July 1816 letter; *Religious Remembrancer* 51(August 16, 1817): 201.

States had achieved victory in the War of 1812, whose last battle was fought in the region.

The organization of women—even on behalf of children and worthy widows—drew some critics,[96] but among evangelical ministers the consensus toward female benevolence seemed favorable to the point of enthusiastic.[97] The members of the Natchez Female Charitable Society periodically allude to "objections" against their own enterprise, with the implication that the nameless detractors took issue with redundancy as opposed to the gender of the organizers.[98] Americans in general were rapidly forming voluntary associations for myriad purposes. Creating a government in microcosm is simply what benevolent-minded individuals did, just as new communities in the United

[96] As the Reverend Joseph Buckminster commiserated with the women of Portsmouth, who had organized a society for the education of young girls: "You have had much to struggle with, from the novelty of the design, the diffidences, fears, and censures, always attending on new attempts, and from the sneer, the ridicule, and the *raillery*, of some who have minds too low to appreciate female improvement, and too illiberal to approve anything they did not originate. But with laudable firmness you have maintained your ground, and supported your design. Continue your patriotic exertions and your difficulties are surmounted." *A Discourse Delivered before the Members of the Portsmouth Female Charity School, October 14, 1803*, (Portsmouth, N.H.: N.S. & W. Peirce, 1803), 11.

[97] "Yes, O virtuous, amiable woman, 'tis thine to alleviate the distresses of misfortune," proclaimed the Reverend Allen Bradford before the Wiscasset Female Asylum; "These are works for which ye are peculiarly fitted; and in all the tender offices of charity and compassion, we must admit, however reluctantly, ye have the pre-eminence." Allen Bradford, *An Address Delivered before the Wiscasset Female Asylum, October 9, 1811, Being Their First Public Meeting after the Act of Incorporation* (Hallowell: Nathaniel Cheever, 1811), 9. Themes about the women's aptitude for benevolence frequently appear in charity sermons as well as the biblical explanations for that state. For example, one sermonizer argued that women were under peculiar obligation to promote Christianity because it had raised them from servile position; David T. Kimball, *The Obligation and Disposition of Females to Promote Christianity* (Newburyport: Ephraim W. Allen, 1819), 1-2. Another argued that biblical justifications superseded temporal objections: "It is said by some, that it is improper for females to form Charity Societies: and this reason has been assigned; that they have not a cent of property of their own. To this it may be replied; 1. That widows and single women have as undoubted a right to dispose of their property as men. 2. It is also evidently authorized by the inspired word, that married women and daughters have a right by vow, to consecrate things to the peculiar service of God; and that if their husbands and fathers do not forbid them, their vows must stand. See Num. chap. 30th. As to forming societies, it may be observed, that the Bible is silent even about men's Missionary and Bible Societies. This matter is left with us to do, as the exigencies of the times require." Seth Williston, *A Sermon, Designed to Point Out Some Ways in Which It Is Proper for Females, to Lend Their Aid in Advancing the Kingdom of Christ* (Catskill, NY: Croswell & Son, 1819), 9.

[98] These "objections" will be discussed in chapter 5.

States adopted Anglo-American laws, including those pertaining to poor relief, as a matter of course.

The Society did make certain adjustments over time, perhaps in response to currents of public disapprobation. To align with female associations elsewhere, or simply to project a "softer" image, the officers soon dropped the titles "president" and "vice-president" and adopted a panel of "directresses" for the top elected position. While "president" persisted in the minutes for some time, the Society's published notices and reports feature titles that had a more distinctly feminine ring. On the whole, there seems to have been little opposition to a group of pious, affluent women forming a charitable society in Natchez. For ladies to organize clubs in support of Federalists or Republicans would have been deemed ludicrous or dangerously subversive, but establishing a religiously-centered, hierarchical entity on behalf of poor children and their widowed mothers seemed to many men and women a natural expansion of the female sphere.

2

The Power of Sympathy

Mr. Johnson, "a very worthy Charitable gentleman," was journeying through the English countryside one day when he happened upon a poor shepherd tending his flock.[1] He stopped and conversed with the man and was much impressed with his neatness as well as his profound piety. When asked whether it might rain, the shepherd replied, "'It shall be such weather as shall please God; and whatever pleases him, pleases me.'"[2] All Mr. Johnson's inquiries met with similar responses. Indeed, the poor shepherd seemed to have no care for worldly wealth but instead effused gratitude for his present condition. He provided honestly for his sickly wife and eight young children, read his Bible daily, and lived every moment in love and fear of God.

The gentleman was so moved by this lowly fellow Christian that he yearned to see him in better circumstances. Knowing that the shepherd was too proud to accept alms, Mr. Johnson enlisted the help of the local vicar, who offered to make him parish clerk as well as master of a Sunday school for needy children. While these posts would allow a more comfortable living, they would not—Mr. Johnson pointed out—make him rich. "'Not rich, Sir?' cried the Shepherd. 'How can I ever be thankful enough for such blessings?…I hope God will give me humility.'"[3] Before parting, the benefactor

[1] Hannah More, *The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain*, *Part I* (London: J. Marshall and R. White, 1795), 3.
[2] Ibid., 5
[3] Hannah More, *The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain*, *Part II* (London: J. Marshall and R. White, 1795), 32.

promised his grateful protégé that he would pay a visit the following year, and every year after that.

The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain by Hannah More was one of the most popular evangelical tracts published in England at the turn of the nineteenth century. Another bestseller was Legh Richmond's *The Dairyman's Daughter*, a similar tale of pious rustics admired and assisted by a benevolent gentleman.[4] Two million copies of these booklets were circulated in the English language, joining numerous others of comparable plot and theme.[5] The men and women who wrote tracts and organized for their distribution were concerned not only about saving souls but preserving the social order, a matter of especial urgency given the recent upheavals in nearby France.[6] Many of these compact, inexpensive works were subsequently printed throughout the United States, and evangelicals there likewise adopted the strategy of forming "tract societies" for their dispersal.[7] Hannah More's writings, and their themes of patronage and deference, seemed to resonate particularly among Americans in the South.[8]

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[4] *The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain* was first published in 1795 and *The Dairyman's Daughter* in 1805. Mark S. Schantz discusses these tracts and several others in "Religious Tracts, Evangelical Reform, and the Market Revolution in Antebellum America," *Journal of the Early Republic* 17 (Autumn 1997): 432-438.

[5] Ibid., 432.

[6] For more on the publication of tracts and formation of distribution societies in England, see Margaret Kinnell, "Sceptreless, Free, Uncircumscribed?: Radicalism, Dissent and Early Children's Books," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 36 (February 1988): 49-71.

[7] The most recent comprehensive work on the subject is David Paul Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). See also Mark S. Schantz, "Religious Tracts, Evangelical Reform, and the Market Revolution in Antebellum America," 425-466. On the corresponding missionary effort of Bible distribution, see Peter J. Wosh, *Spreading the Word: The Bible Business in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

[8] "Few if any writers on religious matters had a greater impact on southern sensibilities than England's Hannah More." Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 438.

The New England Tract Society gave missionaries Samuel Mills and Daniel Smith fifteen thousand copies of various titles to distribute during their tour of the Western territories in 1815.[9] When Reverend Smith returned to the Lower Mississippi Valley the following year, he brought eight thousand more of these "winged messengers of salvation," including copies of *The Dairyman's Daughter* and *The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain*.[10] On this 1816 trip, Smith remained in Natchez for several months and then left to spend the summer in his native Massachusetts. While there, he received a note from the elder of a Presbyterian church near Natchez, who reported that the tracts were producing "a great effect on all classes of people." The elder then related the following occurrence to illustrate:

> A little boy of genteel and moral parents received a couple of Tracts and read them with so much interest and discovered so much gravity of deportment afterwards, that his mother desired to see the little books herself. And when she had commenced, she could not stop until she had read them through. The little boy tells me that the reading of them makes his mother cry. He often enquires of me when you will return with more good books.—Other books, he says are useful for information, but do no good in dying.[11]

[9] Samuel J. Mills and Daniel Smith, *Report of a Missionary Tour Through That Part of the United States Which Lies West of the Allegany Mountains* (Andover: Flagg and Gould, 1815), 6. Though he does not mention Daniel Smith, David Paul Nord discusses Samuel Mills and his trips to the West at length; *Faith in Reading*, 3-5, 13-14, 61-65.

[10] Smith handed out nearly a quarter of them in the Mississippi Territory and notes that 250 were left at Natchez. He discusses the number of tracts he conveyed to the Western territories in both 1815 and 1816 in a letter to the Executive Committee of the New England Tract Society, dated October 11, 1816. Printed in *The Religious Intelligencer* 1 (November 2, 1816): 364. The source of Smith's quoted reference to "winged messengers of salvation" has not been identified.

[11] Ibid.

Those who wrote religious tracts during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries targeted the poor—especially poor children—as their primary audience.[12] However, indigent children were not the only readers of these tracts, as the Presbyterian elder makes clear in his letter to Daniel Smith. A little boy's reaction to one of them piqued the interest of his mother, and not a poor mother but someone who was considered "genteel." If the publication had been *The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain*, it is likely that the woman derived a different lesson from the one intended for the lower classes. Mr. Johnson would have appeared the more familiar character and his condescension and benevolence toward the shepherd worthy of imitation. Though the lesson for poor readers was to adopt piety, frugality, and industry as a way of life, the lesson for "the better sort" was to take notice of social inferiors and make an effort to assist those who were worthy. In short, both high and low could share a strengthened spiritual devotion as a result of their encounters while adhering to the stations assigned them by Providence.[13]

Stories have always possessed the power to move individuals. It is possible, if not probable, that at least some of the ladies who founded the Female Charitable Society had read the tracts disseminated by Reverend Smith and took their lessons to heart. Whatever ultimately persuaded the women to organize an association for poor children, stories were

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[12] Kinnell, "Sceptreless, Free, Uncircumscribed?: Radicalism, Dissent and Early Children's Books," 50-52. Schantz, "Religious Tracts, Evangelical Reform, and the Market Revolution in Antebellum America," 41-43.

[13] In addition to the "history of the book," the study of how past readers responded to literary works has gained renewed scholarly interest. On readership in the early American republic, see in particular Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860*, new ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*, exp. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Candy Gunther Brown, *The Word in the World: Evangelical Writing, Publishing, and Reading in America, 1789-18*80 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). David Paul Nord looks at the ways in which early nineteenth-century publishers expected readers to engage with tracts as well as how those readers actually interacted with them; *Faith in Reading*, chapters 6 and 7.

vital to sustaining and furthering benevolent aims. To be sure, some tales were so well known in the early nineteenth century that a single word or phrase could function as a synecdoche, conjuring the characters, images, and emotions of an entire narrative.

"May it cause some Widow's heart to 'Sing for Joy,'" concludes the Society's constitution.[14] This quoted reference derives from the book of Job and alludes to the passage in which the beleaguered eponymous figure wistfully recalls his days of divine favor. Before his earthly sorrows commenced, he "delivered the Poor that cried, and the Fatherless, and him that had none to help him, and…caused the Widow's heart to sing for joy" and he was blessed by each of them in return.[15] While "leap" is sometimes substituted for "sing," this reference to the "widow's heart" became a common refrain among charitable associations, especially in sermons delivered on their behalf.[16] Like similar other associations, the Natchez Society declined to mention Job by name or cite the verse.[17] There was little need to. Most educated readers and audiences would have immediately recognized the source as well as the story's significance. Prior to his sudden conscription into a celestial wager, Job's life had been singularly blessed. And despite

[14] March 12, 1816, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[15] The verse is from Job 29:11-13: "When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me; because I delivered the Poor that cried, and the Fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me; and I caused the Widow's heart to sing for joy." The Providence Female Charitable Society, for example, quoted this verse on the title page of one published document; *The Charter and Constitution of the Providence Female Charitable Society* (Providence: John Carter, 1803).
[16] Timothy Alden varied the verse with the phrase "leap for joy" in his charitable sermon; *A Discourse, Delivered before the Members of the Portsmouth Female Asylum, at a Third Service on the Sabbath, 16 September, 1804* (Portsmouth, N.H.: J. Melcher, 1804), 13.
[17] Ministers who gave sermons at the annual meetings of female societies often included the verse. In a sermon entitled "Charity Recommended from the Social State" delivered before the Salem Female Charitable Society in 1806, the Reverend Dr. John Prince praises the ladies for philanthropic endeavors that made "*widowed hearts to sing for joy*." John Prince, *Charity Recommended from the Social State, A Discourse Delivered before the Salem Female Charitable Society, September 17, 1806* (Salem: Joshua Cushing, 1806), 31.

the torment he endured as a test of faith, Job was beloved of God and eventually restored to favor, largely because of his lifelong beneficence toward those who were helpless, namely children without fathers and women without husbands. Because the Female Charitable Society targeted these very groups, this biblical episode may have seemed to the members a fitting analogy to their own work. It was only one of many stories they employed to foster public support for their "objects of charity."

After the reference to the "Widow's heart" in the constitution comes a divination: "They will be amply rewarded."[18] In this case, "they" probably harbors a double meaning: rewards would fall to recipients of benevolence as well as those who took the trouble to bestow it. But relieving the helpless required more than benevolent intentions. Relief required funds. When the Female Charitable Society first circulated a subscription paper in the spring of 1816, more than seventy women affixed their names and pledged $1,019 in support. Compared to what the men's Bible association had managed to raise over the course of two years this amount seems stratospheric.[19] Yet considering the Society's stated objective, the amount is actually rather meager. For example, monthly school tuition cost $2.50 per child, and in caring for some of the children, the matron spent from $10 to $15 dollars per month.[20] If she continued to spend at the high end and all twelve children initially enrolled remained in school, then $540—half the Society's

[18] March 12, 1816, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[19] Samuel Mills and Daniel Smith noted in 1815 that the Bible Society had collected only $300 since its founding in 1813; *Report of a Missionary Tour Through That Part of the United States Which Lies West of the Allegany Mountains*, 28.
[20] Amount paid for tuition noted in entry for May 6, 1816. The matron's expenses appear in the entries for May 6, June 4, July 1, and August 7, 1816, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.

funds—would be consumed within a year. Given that the money pledged as annual donations comprised only 25% of the total funds, the financial outlook was grim.[21]

All the organizational prowess in the world did the members little good if they could not persuade the moneyed inhabitants of Natchez to support their endeavors. The Female Charitable Society's constitution could not compel men and women to part with a portion of their earnings as territorial law could. In fact, one of the earliest statutes enacted in Mississippi pertained to the levying of taxes, a portion of which was earmarked for supporting destitute residents of Adams County.[22] The existence of a tax-based system of relief for nearly two decades may have contributed to the ladies' initial reluctance to form a charitable association, but their sentiments changed after realizing that the system was wanting and that relief through voluntary contributions was the best remedy.[23] Benevolent women needed to convince their peers that the poor urgently required additional assistance. To do so, they had to build a bridge between the classes and forge links between "the better sort" and children of "the lower orders," much in the way that evangelical tracts fostered sympathy toward individuals who were not even real.

Literary scholars have long examined the way in which emotional impulses pervaded cultural production at the turn of the nineteenth century, a phenomenon which was a driving force in American political discourse during the Revolution and the

[21] The amount under the column "annual donations" totals to $250.
[22] I am referring here to Chapter 15, which was enacted in April 1799. P.L. Rainwater, "Sargent's Code," *The American Journal of Legal History* 11 (April 1967), 198-204.
[23] According to Anne C. Loveland this approach was pervasive of evangelicals in the South during the early nineteenth century. They targeted the "urban poor" and "in a variety of ways they sought to supplement the tax-financed relief for the needy that was administered by municipal authorities." *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1980), 167.

establishment of a republican government.[24] Without question, emotional impulses also lay at the heart of the religious revival sweeping across the country, most notably salvation through a personal conversion experience.[25] Biblical allusions, fictional portrayals, and "true accounts" all combined to awaken the spirit. In the case of Natchez, they also served to alter the way affluent citizens regarded the children of the poor. Under the civil system of juvenile relief, indigent minors were more or less invisible, tucked away in the homes of masters or caretakers. Benevolent women, on the other hand, strove to bring those children out into the open: by making them the focus of various fundraising schemes; by weaving stories about them in public appeals for

[24] Andrew Burstein writes, "By revisioning republicanism, we can and should amplify the power of feeling as a comparable standard by which to measure patriotic self-regard and cultural identity," in his article "The Political Character of Sympathy" *Journal of the Early Republic* 21 (Winter 2001): 632, written as a postscript to his monograph *Sentimental Democracy: Evolution of America's Romantic Self-Image* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999). See also Julia A. Stern, *The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Elizabeth Barnes, *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Herbert R. Brown, "Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century American Drama" *American Literature* 4 (March 1932): 47-60; and Norman S. Fiering, "Irresistible Compassion: An Aspect of Eighteenth-Century Sympathy and Humanitarianism" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37 (April-June, 1976): 195-218; which charts many of the literary and philosophical sources informing Anglo-American notions of sympathy. Even "sentimentality" is receiving renewed calls for exploration. See June Howard, "What is Sentimentality?" *American Literary History* 11 (Spring 1999): 63-81; as well as Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* and Tompkins, *Sensational Designs*. One of the most insightful analyses of sentiment and sympathy in English literature is Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel: The Senses in Social Context* (1994; repr., New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), whose findings are highly applicable to developments in America.

[25] Emotion as a defining characteristic of evangelicalism has been explored by numerous scholars. Apart from the histrionics engaged by sermonizers, the outward intensity of emotional responses was seen as reflective of personal spiritual elevation, so notes Christine Leigh Heyrman in *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 33-40. Narratives of the conversion "experience" were a staple of this period of revival. In his letters regarding Natchez, Daniel Smith points to emotion as a sign that salvation was hopeful, an assessment that was commonplace. Among the many scholarly analyses of this phenomenon, see Philip N. Mulder, *A Controversial Spirit: Evangelical Awakenings in the South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 137-42; Fred J. Hood, *Reformed America The Middle and Southern States* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1980), 169-97; and Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order*, 4-13. Though focusing on the mid to latter nineteenth century, John Corrigan provides one of the most thorough considerations of the subject in *Business of the Heart: Religion and Emotion in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

support; and by making them a spectacle. Through stories and spectacles, the ladies hoped to create for charity children a community of generous and steadfast parents.

Some in the Female Charitable Society could truly sympathize with their beneficiaries. Though spared the plight of indigence, members who had themselves been widowed or orphaned knew the precariousness and uncertainty of losing the male head of household. Whatever impulses pushed benevolent women to action, they clearly relied on emotion and imagined ties to advance their cause. Playing on public perceptions of certain groups, perceptions at least partly informed by contemporary fiction, the women stoked a sense of urgency regarding poor and orphaned children and succeeded in generating donations. In drumming up support, however, the Society was caught between a love of sensationalism, a horror of impropriety, and a fear that emotions could spiral out of control if cultivated too vigorously—or in the wrong direction.

The Spectacle of Charity

Ladies were the only subscribers to the Female Charitable Society upon its founding in the spring of 1816, and each one contributed from five to twenty dollars. Gentlemen are conspicuously absent from the list—even Daniel Smith, the ostensible "father" of the association, does not appear as a contributor. However, one man does receive early mention in the minutes. In late March, a "Dr. King" presented $59.50 to the Society, the single largest donation given during the first year, but the money did not come from himself alone.[26] It came from the community. And the manner in which he

[26] April 1, 1816, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.

collected those funds would prove a valuable source of income and publicity for the Society in the years to follow.

"Dr. King's Electricity and Galvanism Exhibition" was held at city hall on March 25, 1816.[27] While there is little information about King, he was probably an itinerant entertainer.[28] Though much smaller than New Orleans, Natchez was a sizeable urban center and, thus, a popular stop for those who performed for a living.[29] Word of mouth and cheap broadsides went a long way to advertise events, but performers who especially wished to attract genteel patrons also advertised in the local newspaper. In his published notice, Dr. King briefly describes what will take place and announces that all the proceeds will be presented to the "Female Charitable Society," adding that "Those Ladies and Gentlemen who wish to patronize so charitable an institution are solicited to partake of the evening's amusement." He then quotes a couplet appropriate to the occasion: "*Charity comes with power to bless/With open hand and tender heart*." [30]

Though cryptic, the verse evokes the dual blessing of Job: the giver of alms is sanctified as much as the receiver is fortified. Whether or not the readers of the

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[27] Ibid.

[28] An advertisement appears in the *Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer* on March 27, 1816 announcing that he would soon present his "Lecture on the Science of Electricity…[for] positively the last time in this city."

[29] See James Delbourgo, *A Most Amazing Scene of Wonders: Electricity and Enlightenment in Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), Richardson Wright, *Hawkers and Walkers in Early America: Strolling Peddlers, Preachers, Lawyers, Doctors, Players, and Others, from the Beginning to the Civil War* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1927,) and John C. Greene, "Science and the Public in the Age of Jefferson," *Isis* 49 (March 1958): 13-25. Though focusing on a later period, Margaret W. Rossiter conveys an image of what Natchez spectators may have beheld in "Benjamin Silliman and the Lowell Institute: The Popularization of Science in Nineteenth-Century America," *The New England Quarterly* 44 (December 1971): 602-26. Around the same time, incidentally, Mary Shelley was learning about galvanism and developing ideas for *Frankenstein.* See Iwan Rhys Morus, *Frankenstein's Children: Electricity, Exhibition, and Experiment in Early-Nineteenth-Century London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

[30] *Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer*, March 20, 1816. The source of the quoted couplet has not been identified.

Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer recognized the source of that couplet, it clearly served to project an otherwise secular event as something sacred. In other words, the focus of the evening was not amusement but raising money for organized benevolence—an opportunity for Mississippians to feel (for a dollar) the thrill of contributing to a very worthy cause in addition to witnessing an exciting spectacle. The eyes might be engaged by scientific phenomena, but the "tender heart" would be blessed by something unseen.

That Dr. King secured city hall, the most prominent public building in Natchez, as his venue must have given his performance an elevated standing. The same probably went for his proclaimed connection with the Female Charitable Society, as he could be regarded as a philanthropist rather than simply a performer. Of course, Dr. King could have given the donation quietly. He could have held his exhibition and parted with the profit without making his altruistic intention known in advance. While it is possible that the "Electrician" staged his performance with no thought but benevolence, more likely he was using charity to promote himself, an arrangement that had been famously employed on behalf of charitable organizations in Britain and colonial America.[31] Without question, benevolent women were using him as well. They had recently held their first

[31] The Foundling Hospital of London may have been an early model for associations like the Natchez Female Charitable Society. This orphan house, founded in the mid-eighteenth century, became a favorite local attraction, and concerts given there by George Friedrich Handel drew large, generous crowds. Indeed, the Hospital was a place to see and be seen, and gradually it also became a place where names were made. William Hogarth donated paintings for public view and thus launched what would become the Royal Academy of Art as well as a national fashion for "British" artists. See Ruth K. McClure, *Coram's Children: The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) and R.H. Nichols, *The History of the Foundling Hospital* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935). With respect to reciprocal arrangements in colonial America, evangelist George Whitfield, who toured the East Coast delivering sermons for support of his orphan house in Georgia, is probably the most famous example and will be discussed in greater length in chapter 5.

meeting in the parlor of Mrs. Davis's home, yet Dr. King's exhibition allowed them to bring their cause to the seat of municipal government.[32] Not only had the electrician given the Society publicity and increased its funds; he enabled the ladies to "perform" in public without suffering the indignity of taking the stage. As many as sixty people attended Dr. King's exhibition in March 1816, judging by the ticket prices and the amount of $59.50—half the evening's proceeds—which he subsequently gave to the Society. In terms of purchasing power, this sum covered the matron's expenses in tending charity children for at least four months. There is little wonder, then, that members eagerly welcomed future benefit performances.

The reliance on voluntary contributions demanded that benevolent women emerge from their domestic milieu and actively promote their cause within the community. While ladies had long attended public gatherings of various kinds, organizing them and appearing at their forefront were new experiences for them and for the city. If the Female Charitable Society wished to flourish, members had little choice but to develop a public presence. However, they had to maintain an appearance of propriety or risk losing the support of the citizenry.[33]

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[32] King's performance proved so successful that citizens pressed him to repeat the performance a couple of days later. He did so, though not on behalf of the Society. *Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer*, April 10, 1816. Two weeks after the benefit, the Society officers took another opportunity to link their cause with the celebrity by publishing a notice of their appreciation: "At a meeting of the Presidents and Managers…it was unanimously resolved, that the grateful thanks of the Society be returned to Dr. King, for his benevolence in aiding so generously the laudable views of the above institution." April 1, 1816, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.

[33] Anne M. Boylan points out that female benevolent associations benefited from the rise of "market capitalism" during the early republic, which yielded copious opportunities for the generation of wealth. She surveys a number of fundraising strategies and goals among associations in New York and Boston in *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 173-93. Boylan also asserts that propriety led societies to select officers who were married, though single women were very often chosen to serve as treasurers because of "common law

There was no doubt of propriety when the subject of the performance was explicitly religious in nature. Mr. E. H. Huntington called at Natchez in March 1817 to deliver a series of discourses on "the advantages of aiming at moral excellence…grounded on Christianity."[34] A critic for the local paper gave the orator a highly favorable review and lamented the evening's poor attendance, which he attributed to inclement weather. He reminded readers of their duty to *perform* for distinguished performers, as men like Huntington traveled throughout the nation and carried with them reports of the communities they had visited. "The citizens of Natchez can produce as *clear a proof* of taste and encouragement as any place whatever," the critic proclaimed, admonishing those readers who had stayed home more from apathy rather than a fear of soggy roads.[35]

Attendance sharply increased for one particular performance, the benefit Mr. Huntington held for the Female Charitable Society on the evening of March 24, 1817. Like King, Huntington advertised the event in the newspaper, though he did not include any poetic reference or appeal to benevolent intentions. He simply announced that "the moiety of the proceeds" would be conveyed to the ladies.[36] After the event, the orator addressed a very flattering missive to the "Female Benevolent Society," an error suggestive of the ubiquity of such associations, whose their names were almost

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restraints on married women's control of property. Ibid., 57. As Lori D. Ginzberg notes, fundraising was integral to the "business of benevolence," though over time women involved with organized charity faced increasing challenges over the propriety of the female management of finances. *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 41-48.

[34] *Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer*, March 14, 1817.

[35] *Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer*, March 19, 1817.

[36] Ibid.

interchangeable. The secretary recorded the entire letter from this "gentleman from the States" who enclosed $63 "in furtherance of the laudable and Benevolent objects of its institution." That amount, explained Huntington, represented half the profit from the evening's event after deducting expenses. He went on to add that while he "will have many motives to remember with satisfaction of his visit to Natchez, he will have none of regret, except that he could not have been more serviceable to your society, and rendered his performances more worthy of the patronage, and polite attention with which they were honoured."[37]

For someone who seems to have been merely passing through Natchez, Mr. Huntington demonstrated a marked interest in the recently-formed female association. Perhaps a notice of the Female Charitable Society's annual meeting, held only a few weeks earlier, had stirred his charitable impulses. Or perhaps he sought them out on purpose. This may have been the itinerant actor's standard procedure: to curry favor by openly patronizing the local female benevolent organization, a move that could be viewed as both magnanimous and chivalrous. A lengthy newspaper advertisement for one of Huntington's performances mentions that he had delivered his discourses for Bible societies in Charleston, Richmond, Norfolk, and Alexandria.[38] Each of these cities boasted at least one female charitable association.[39] Just as benevolent women allied

[37] From his letter dated March 25, 1817, which appears in the entry for April 12, 1817, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[38] *Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer*, March 14, 1817.
[39] The Ladies Benevolent Society was founded in Charleston in 1813; the Female Humane Association in Richmond in 1805; and the Norfolk Female Orphan Society in 1804. While a Female Charitable Society was founded in Alexandria in 1822, benevolent women in that city may have organized earlier in support of a free school for girls founded in 1812. Timothy J. Lockley, "Southern Charities Project," http://www.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/SouthernCharitiesProject/index.htm.

themselves with widows and orphans—traditionally unimpeachable groups—the orator connected himself with what he and most others perceived as a noble and irreproachable organization. Regardless of the fact that the Society was composed solely of women, or perhaps *because* of that fact, Mr. Huntington entertained in their name. Whether his profits would have been higher or lower had he not linked his fame with the ladies is impossible to determine, but the Society received more publicity as well as a considerable windfall, at a time when the officers were beginning to note a financial pinch.[40]

The religious and moral nature of Mr. Huntington's speech reflected the Society's work more than Dr. King's exhibition had. Yet in publicizing his event, the latter symbolically linked electricity and galvanism with benevolence. A benefit held on behalf of the Society in 1824 by a "Mr. Snell" contained a performance that directly dealt with the "objects of charity." Snell, probably an itinerant like King and Huntington, was multi-talented to say the least. The actor opened the evening's entertainment with a "Philosophical & Mechanical Theatre," involving a collection of electrical experiments, which may have called to mind those witnessed at the Society's first fundraising event. Next, Mr. Snell presented "a grand Pantomimic Scene…of the Ancient Court of Alexander the Great." He then displayed a hundred images of Chinese paintings in the "Phantasmagora," a primitive form of slide show using lanterns. The final act was one that must have seemed particularly appropriate for the occasion: a performance with "artificial figures" of *The Children in the Wood.*[41]

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[40] On April 2, 1817, the officers met to discuss submitting an account to the orphan's court for reimbursement of funds expended on children thought chargeable to the county, an issue that will be explored more thoroughly in Chapter 4. Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[41] *Mississippi State Gazette*, March 20, 1824.

The audience was probably already well acquainted with this English play, which had made its American debut in New York in 1796. That year, an anonymous critic gushed in *The New York Magazine* that the play "gave us inexpressible delight: we never remembered to have experienced such pleasingly painful sensations as are excited by this little drama."[42] By the following month, *The Children in the Wood* was playing to an "overflowing house," and other theatres around the country began staging productions, including those for the purpose of charity.[43] It is interesting to note that a little more than a year after that first New York performance, the Society for Poor Widows with Small Children was founded in that city by Isabella, a genteel widow of reduced circumstances, along with some of Manhattan's most notable women.[44] Widely considered by historians as the first nonsectarian female charitable association organized in the United States, the "Widow's Society" may have had nothing to do with the "little drama" that was taking the genteel public by storm. Then again, perhaps the "pleasingly painful sensations" stirred something more than a moment of amusement. The copious prose editions of *The Children in the Wood* printed at the turn of the nineteenth century certainly indicate a

[42] "Theatrical Register, No. III," *The New York Magazine, or Literary Repository* 6 (January 1795): 1.
[43] At the turn of the nineteenth century, *The Children in the Wood* was performed throughout the United States in large cities like Philadelphia and smaller ones like Portland. June C. Ottenberg notes that this play was one of the most commonly produced during the 1790s; "Popularity of Two Operas in Philadelphia in the 1790s," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 18 (December 1987): 207. See also James Moreland, "The Theatre in Portland in the Eighteenth Century," *The New England Quarterly* 11 (June 1938): 339; Delmer D. Rogers, "Public Music Performances in New York City from 1800 to 1850," *Anuario Interamericano de Investigacion Musical* 6 (1970): 29; and Susan L. Porter, "Performance Practice in American Opera at the Turn of the 19th Century as Seen in 'Children in the Wood,' A Representative Musical" (PhD diss., University of Colorado, 1977). Porter also discusses this "opera" at length, including detailed descriptions of costumes and staging, in *With an Air Debonair: Musical Theatre in America, 1785-1815* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991). One such benefit was held in Philadelphia for the children of an actor who had performed in the play. As one contemporary critic wrote, "The Performance of the Evening could not fail to please. It was in the cause of humanity." *The Theatrical Censor*, January 31, 1806. A benefit performance of "Children in the Wood" for a "Mr. Carr" is mentioned in "Theatrical Register, No. VI," *The New York Magazine, or Literary Repository* 6 (April 1795): 194.
[44] See chapter 1, fn 99.

great interest in the story by a wide variety of audiences.[45] In all its forms, the tale may have helped stoke a sense of urgency toward those who resembled the title characters.

The great popularity of both the play and the prose versions of *The Children in the Wood* may be attributed to the fact that they were based on a beloved English ballad known to many Americans, young and old, rich and poor alike.[46] The story is simple and reminiscent of other European folktales of endangered children, such as Hansel and Gretel. In the ballad, two young orphans, a brother and a sister, were abandoned in the forest by their guardian-uncle, who yearned to seize their substantial inheritance. However, what theatergoers saw in New York and Natchez differed from the old song and nursery tale.

The original story ends with the children's lonely death in the forest and capital punishment for their avaricious uncle. "A moral advice," in the opinion of one American critic in 1796, "to all those who are left Guardians to the Orphan; which is one of the first and greatest charges of this life;—and alas! a charge which is too often abus'd."[47] By

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[45] Clara English's prose version of the story seems to have been especially popular in the early republic. *The Children in the Wood, an Instructive Tale* was published in the United States as early as 1803 in Philadelphia, and over the next couple of decades, it was printed and reprinted in every major urban center in the country. Surprisingly, there seem to be no scholarly studies of this author, though her work reached a wide swathe of the American population, judging by the frequent printings of her book for nearly a quarter century.

[46] "Theatrical Register, No. IV," *The New York Magazine, or Literary Repository* 6 (February 1795): 65. Benjamin Franklin referred to Massachusetts country girls as singers of psalms and "old simple ditties," including "The Children in the Wood." Nicholas E. Tawa, "Secular Music in the Late-Eighteenth-Century American Home," *The Musical Quarterly* 61 (October 1975): 516. English poet Henry Kirke White recalled "Babes in the Wood" as a profound influence, recording in a poem his feelings as a small child as a nursery maid recounted the tale: "She told of innocence fordoom'd to bleed,/Of wicked guardians bent on bloody deed./Of little children murdered as they slept;/While at each pause we wrung our hands and wept." Excerpt from the poem "Childhood" quoted in "Life and Remains of Henry Kirke White," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine United* 4 (August 1811): 97.

[47] "A Critique on the Babes in the Wood," *The Massachusetts Magazine, or Monthly Museum* 8 (August 1796): 444. The anonymous author of the original ballad offers his own moral: "All you who Executors be,

contrast, the play ends on a cheerful note. The brother and sister are miraculously discovered. The children are then taken to their parents who, also miraculously, turn out to be alive—a radical plot alteration, which also found its way into many of the prose versions and appears to have met with favor.[48] Because the author of the play designed the parts of the unfortunate orphans for boy and girl actors, he may have modified the outcome to avoid ending the performance on such a visually unsettling scene.[49] On the other hand, perhaps he and the other authors who adapted the tale were constructing a new "moral advice," a lesson regarding the power of sympathetic adults to save children in distress.

Mr. Snell likely took his performance of *The Children in the Wood* from the recent play, whose ending reflected the "happily ever after" version of the tale. He probably relied on artificial figures because he was a one-man show, yet the result of witnessing inanimate objects as opposed to live actors added one more layer of insulation for viewers' sensibilities. While the actor and the members of the Female Charitable Society desired to provoke a strong emotional response, they had to mitigate pathos for the sake of propriety. Otherwise, excessive suffering would deteriorate into revulsion and discourage rather than foster benevolent support. An audience experiencing

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and Overseers eke./Of children that be fatherless,/and infants mild and meek./Take you example by this thing,/and yield to each his right,/Lest God with such like misery,/your wicked deeds requite." From an American reprint of the English ballad; *The Children in the Woods* (Hartford: n.p., 1810?).

[48] "In dramatizing it the poet has, with a justifiable license, saved the lives of the parents, who are supposed to have been abroad, and restored their forsaken children to their arms!" *The Philadelphia Minerva, Containing a Variety of Fugitive Pieces in Prose* 2 (June 18, 1796): 3.

[49] American productions cast children in the roles. The critic who wrote of the first New York production remarked that "too much praise cannot be bestowed on Miss Harding and Miss Solomons, who, in speaking, in singing, and in action, surpassed all we could have conceived of children of their age." "Theatrical Register, No. III," *The New York Magazine, or Literary Repository* 6 (January 1795): 1. Sometimes a boy played a role, but in general it seems that only children were cast for the title roles.

sensations that were "pleasingly painful" would be more inclined to reflect and act upon the lessons conveyed than an audience emotionally and physically shocked by scenes that were merely painful.[50]

In its various forms, the story effectively roused terrifying images, as evidenced by anecdotal accounts, including one recorded in 1839 by a twelve-year-old girl who was the daughter of a wealthy planter and granddaughter of a founding subscriber of the Natchez Female Charitable Society.[51] Mary Savage Conner was walking with her governess outside Natchez one afternoon when they were suddenly confronted by a herd of stampeding cows. Fearing for their lives, the pair dashed into the forest. "After traveling half an hour we got lost, and we expected that some ferocious animal would spring from the thickets," she recalled in her journal a year after the incident occurred, adding that "the story of the children in the woods was brought forcibly to my mind."[52]

What emotions were stirred among those who viewed Mr. Snell's puppetry performance of *The Children in the Wood*? Did they experience the same pathetic exhilaration that helped make the play an overnight sensation when it debuted nearly thirty years earlier? It is quite possible that children were part of the audience, and their

[50] Ann Jessie Van Sant examines sensibility as both a literary and scientific phenomenon in England during the eighteenth century, and discusses at length the reliance of charitable institutions on cultivating proper mental and physical responses to advance their cause. While "gazing on suffering" could move individuals to benevolent action, many believed that excessive anguish lessened the virtue of pathetic responses because they provoked an instinctive, almost animalistic, reaction. "Because sensibility was the basis for an immediate, almost involuntary sympathy," Van Sant points out, "it was easily incorporated into a traditional framework as an explanation for that passional capacity to which rhetoricians, dramatists, or ethical writers appealed. Furthermore, because of the emphasis during this period on the role of the affections in moral life, appeals to emotion for ethical purposes were reinforced." Suffering—both visible and imagined—could guide the behavior of receptive individuals as long as it was properly contained. *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel*, 48-49.

[51] Mary Conner subscribed to the Natchez Female Charitable Society in 1817; Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.

[52] Mary Savage Conner, *A Young Girl's Journal* (Redwood, MS: Blake Printing Press, 1982).

presence would have heightened the story's poignancy. Though 1824 was too early for Mary Savage Conner, some of her acquaintance may have witnessed the play and left with images of lost children, treacherous guardians, and beneficent adults seared into their memory. Undoubtedly, the connection between the story and female benevolence was obvious to all who attended the benefit that night—far more obvious than any connection with galvanism. A kind-hearted servant may have been the rescuer in the play, but the Female Charitable Society, whose members were likely present, emerged from the theater as the acknowledged protector of Natchez's lost children.

Public Roles and Performances

The amount Mr. Snell presented to the Society after his performance is unknown, but if he at least matched his predecessors, the ladies received a donation that was not insubstantial. However, these benefits were too infrequent to rely on as a major source of income. The operations of the Female Charitable Society demanded a more regular system of fundraising, and so the members created an event of their own.

In England, benevolent associations had staged public celebrations of their founding since the early eighteenth century, and the custom was adopted by many associations in the United States as well.[53] The result was that wherever benevolent women organized, a new festive date was etched into the local calendar. To be sure, Independence Day was the most popular and unifying public event in the American landscape. Every July Fourth, Natchez linked with Boston and Philadelphia and

[53] See Sarah Lloyd, "Pleasing Spectacles and Elegant Dinners: Conviviality, Benevolence and Anniversary Dinners in Eighteenth-Century London," *The Journal of British Studies* 41 (January 2002): 23-57.

Washington and New York, as elaborate dinners for the wealthy, tavern toasts for those less so, and the spectacle of parades and fireworks for all forged a nationalist spirit and helped strengthen bonds among the states and territories.[54] While annual meetings of benevolent associations were conducted with much less fanfare, each organization hosted an anniversary event.[55] As a result, female charitable societies impressed the day of their founding onto the polite calendar and effected a new communal experience for early republic Americans both locally and, in a looser sense, nationally.

The first annual meeting of the Natchez Female Charitable Society took place on Monday, March 3, 1817, but on the day before, the Reverend Daniel Smith organized a special benefit sermon at the Presbyterian Church.[56] Sermons were a staple of these annual events as well as a sure, if somewhat tiresome, method of fundraising. In 1803, a minister speaking on behalf of a Boston charitable society remarked to the ladies that "the frequent occasions for Sermons upon Charity, have so far exhausted the subject, that nothing new is left to be said upon it, and scarce can even the novelty of the vehicle be expected." Still, he granted them permission to sell copies of his sermon if they thought it might further assist their cause.[57] Numerous societies published and distributed copies

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[54] See David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Simon P. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); Len Travers, *Celebrating the Fourth: Independence Day and the Rites of Nationalism in the Early American Republic* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997).

[55] Anne M. Boylan mentions that the "anniversary sermon delivered by a sympathetic and admiring clergyman" was a fundraising mainstay of women's organized benevolence, but she looks more closely at the "fairs" held by various associations from the 1830s onward. *The Origins of Women's Activism*, 21, 182-85.

[56] *Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer*, February 12, 1817.

[57] Samuel Parker, *Charity of Children Enforced, in a Discourse Delivered in Trinity Church, Boston, Before the Subscribers to the Boston Female Asylum, Sept. 23, 1803, at Their Third Anniversary* (Boston: Russell and Cutler, 1803).

of sermons delivered upon their anniversaries, and even a cursory sampling reveals that the Boston minister's assertion was not baseless. The same appeals, the same phrasing, and very often the same scriptural references, such as the verse from Job, render these discourses similar, to the point of their being interchangeable.[58] Sadly, no copies of Daniel Smith's charity sermons are known to exist, so whether he followed in the generalist vein of other clergymen or delivered an address specific to the Natchez Society remains a matter of speculation.

Though no details about the charity church service were recorded, doubtless there were similarities with the secular fundraising benefits. First of all, Reverend Smith addressed a mixed audience, including members of the Presbyterian congregation.[59] Next, there was a collection of funds. No tickets were required to attend the service; instead, the amount given was left to the discretion and conscience of the individual, with the possibility that the baskets passed around would accumulate more than a set admission price. And then there was the performance. Like Huntington, Smith appealed to the ear in delivering his sermon. However, there was also a strong visual component to the service, one which may have proven as effective as the minister's exegeses and declamations, if not more so: the presence of the charity children themselves.

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[58] Numerous untitled discourses of the period were surveyed, such as John Bullard, *A Discourse, Delivered at Pepperell, September 19, 1815, Before the Charitable Female Society in That Town, and Published at Their Request* (Pepperell: R. Boylston, 1815). Some of these anniversary sermons focus more specifically on a subject, yet similarities in structure and rhetoric abound nonetheless. See for example, John Prince, *Charity Recommended from the Social State of Man* (Salem: Joshua Cushing, 1806), *A Discourse Delivered before the Salem Female Charitable Society, September 17, 1806*; Nathan Strong, *The Character of a Good and Virtuous Women, a Discourse, Delivered by the Desire and in the Presence of The Female Beneficent Society, in Hartford, October 4th, A.D. 1809* (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1809); Seth Williston, *A Sermon, Designed to Point Out Some Ways in Which It Is Proper for Females, to Lend Their Aid in Advancing the Kingdom of Christ* (Catskill: Croswell and Son, 1819).

[59] As discussed in chapter 1, many of the women involved with Female Charitable Society were also founding members of the Presbyterian church in Natchez.

The children must have made a moving sight. Natchez was a small enough community for congregants to recognize which youngsters belonged to whom, but even a stranger would have taken notice of a group of children—at least four boys and five girls of ages ranging from six to nine—sitting together and dressed in uniform.[60] They served as a public testimony of the ladies' benevolent success, and they also reinforced the minister's homily. Exhortations about the Christian duty of assisting the poor and the fatherless were made much more poignant by their conspicuous presence.

The cultivation of "sympathetic visibility" was common among charitable institutions in England during the eighteenth century, according to Ann Jessie Van Sant who describes the phenomenon as a linking of "sympathetic feelings with visual perception and the imagination."[61] Indeed, the funding of voluntary institutions demanded the active participation of "philanthropic objects as instruments of pathos and demonstration."[62] The children of the Foundling Hospital were a popular London attraction for genteel visitors, who regarded the building as a sort of benevolent pleasure garden. American associations devoted to children in the early republic were also active in putting their charges on display, a calculated move judging from contemporary accounts. In the printed charity sermon from the annual meeting of the Portsmouth Female Asylum, for example, a footnote explains that the girls "were dressed in neat uniform and, attended by their governess, were placed in full view of the assembly."[63] The presence of the matron ensured that the children behaved agreeably, and along with

[60] The last list of children recorded before the 1817 annual meeting appears in the entry for December 2, 1816, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[61] Van Sant, *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel*, 16.
[62] Ibid., 16-44. Taken from the title of chapter 2.
[63] Alden, *A Discourse, Delivered before the Members of the Portsmouth Female Asylum*, 11.

their neat appearance, they formed a display that reflected the ladies' careful management.

In December 1816, a few months before the charity service and the first annual meeting, the Natchez Female Charitable Society ordered that the children be sent to church every Sunday "neatly clad in a suitable dress all of one colour."[64] Though frequent, descriptions of clothing in the minutebook are often vague. However, there is one reference to a purchase of "16 yards blue cloth" for both under and outer garments, the only instance in which a specific color is mentioned.[65] The reference is dated several years after the first annual meeting, yet it is possible that plain blue was the fabric of choice for Society managers from the beginning. Given the wearers of it, the color was most appropriate.

In England, as far back as the sixteenth century, the color blue had become a symbol of charity. One of the oldest of "free schools" was Christ's Hospital, whose pupils became known as "Blue-coat boys." Charles Lamb extolled "the respect and even kindness, which his well-known garb never fails to procure him in the streets of the metropolis," but in another essay he reflected on his experiences as a pupil with less

[64] December 2, 1816, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[65] Ibid., October 10, 1822.

nostalgia.[66] Other free schools mandated a similar uniform, so that the blue coat became synonymous with charity education, an association that was known across the Atlantic.[67]

While a number of free schools were established in colonial British America, the uniform was apparently not adopted on this side of the Atlantic until the rise of female benevolence at the turn of the nineteenth century. The managers of the Boston Female Asylum, for instance, dressed their girls in charity's color. As they noted in a published account of one annual meeting: "The Children of the Asylum, dressed in a neat, blue uniform, were placed together in an elevated situation, fronting the congregation, attended by their Governess."[68] The "uniform" mentioned in the Portsmouth Asylum account may have been blue as well, and given the evidence, it seems likely that the Natchez charity children sitting together at the Presbyterian church and at the Female Charitable Society's annual meeting wore a garb traditionally emblematic of their condition as "children of the public."[69] The costume served as a sort of *toga praetexta*. Worn by young, free-born boys and girls in ancient Rome, this otherwise adult piece of clothing was distinguished by a purple border that signaled the wearer's protected status

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[66] In "Recollections of Christ's Hospital he asserts that "his very garb, as it is antique and venerable, feeds his self-respect; as it is a badge of dependence." *The Works of Charles Lamb*, vol. 4 (Boston: Crosby, Nichols, Lee and Company, 1860). In his essay "Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago," Lamb scoffs at his earlier, eulogistic work, noting that he dropped "the other side of the argument most ingeniously." *The Essays of Elia* (1913, repr.; New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, 1906), 14.

[67] "A blue-coat boy, or, in other words, a boy educated in a free school, in London, occupied, for many years, a high seat in the councils of his country, amid the praises of a grateful nation." From an article detailing the history of a Philadelphia free school founded in 1796 by a group of ladies. "Free School," *The Port-Folio* 3 (July 30, 1803): 243.

[68] Joseph Eckley, *A Discourse, Delivered before the Members of the Boston Female Asylum, September 24, 1802, Being Their Second Anniversary* (Boston: Ornamental Printing Office, 1802). See also Susan Lynne Porter, "The Benevolent Asylum—Image and Reality: The Care and Training of Female Orphans in Boston, 1800-1840 (PhD diss., Boston University, 1984), 109.

[69] Barbara Bellows notes that inmates of the Charleston Orphan House were dressed in uniform, which according to one of the commissioners, assured "that our little charges be known abroad, be recognized everywhere, as the children of the public…as the little ones whom it has pleased the city to bestow its protection upon." *Benevolence Among Slaveholders*, 138.

to potentially preying adults.[70] The managers of the Female Charitable Society often spoke of the charity children as under their "protection," a circumstance that a blue uniform would have made visually explicit.[71] Whether at church or about town, the blue uniform also served as a constant reminder to the wealthy public of their role, their Christian duty, in helping the poor and the fatherless. Dressing boys and girls in uniform also had a practical advantage. Clothes fashioned from a single fabric were less expensive than individualized outfits. Citizens could therefore feel assured that their donations were not being expended on "frippery."

The boys and girls in the Society's care were also the focal point of the Female Charitable Society's annual meeting, held at the charity school the day after Reverend Smith's service. "About forty ladies attended and viewed the Children pursuing their different studies," recorded the secretary in the minutes.[72] The viewing of the children was a vital component of these meetings, and in many ways they resembled theatrical productions. To begin with, each party involved played a specific role. Ministers admonished current and potential subscribers to support the Society, whose protégés were busily demonstrating the fruits of charitable exertion. In their appearance and actions, the children showed that contributions were being well spent. "The progress of the Children belonging to the Female Charitable Society were inspected," noted the secretary, "and

[70] Female children wore the *toga praetexta* until their marriage whereas male children exchanged it for the *toga virilis*, the garb of manhood, upon entering their sixteenth or seventeenth year. Though he remained within the bounds of the *patria potestas*, donning the manly toga, which was not adorned with the shielding purple border, signaled that the boy had matured into a full-fledged citizen. Florence Dupont, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1989), 223.
[71] For example, at a special meeting on June 1, 1818, the officers met in part to discuss the removal of Washington White and ascertain "by what authority he was removed from the protection of the 'Society.'" Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[72] Ibid., March 3, 1817.

found them to have progressed very rapidly for the short space of time some had been there." Choosing the school as the meeting's venue was also deliberate. Apparently, the staging worked, for at the meeting's end, the managers were "quite successful in adding yearly as well as new subscribers."[73] Among the subscribers added were twenty-four gentlemen, one of whom pledged the exceptionally generous donation of $100.[74]

Except for Reverend Smith, the gentlemen of Natchez did not attend the annual meeting. The election of new officers and other business pertaining to the operation of the Society would have made a mixed audience improper. Benevolent women were in charge, yet they conferred one item of business on the minister: the reading of the annual report. Delegating that task to Daniel Smith was another calculated stage decision. His gender and his ordained office infused the occasion with a gravitas that the "directresses" could not achieve for themselves. Of course, everyone would have known that Reverend Smith was serving as an adjunct to the Society; the report was composed by the ladies and all the accomplishments mentioned were their own as well. Like charity sermons, annual reports of the year's activities and expenditures were regularly published. While no copy of the Female Charitable Society's first report has been found, the others that made their way into the minutebook and local newspapers show a fairly standard format, including a summary of funds collected and spent as well as the number of boys and girls relieved by their efforts. At the end of the first year, for example, there were "twelve

[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid. List of gentlemen subscribers included at the back of minutebook; all entries are dated 1817. NCHR.

Children already admitted, part of whom are boarded, clothed, and instructed at the entire expence of the Society."[75]

Aside from their operational details, reports greatly resembled sermons, particularly in the pleas for assistance. It is difficult to imagine Reverend Smith or any other man of the cloth surpassing the eloquence of the Society's annual exhortations, which reinforced the evangelical purpose of the charitable project, and not only for destitute boys and girls. In one of the reports, for instance, the ladies cast their charity in cosmic terms. The relief of poor children was not only an altruistic end but a means of redemption, one which skinflints should take care to heed:

> They who live in affluence and do not extend their charity to those who stand in need of it, are strangers to the delightful pleasures that arise from the exercise of benevolence; and at the approach of death, they can derive little comfort from the retrospect of their past life. But they who imitate the example of Him, who was the greatest friend of the human race, by extending their sympathy and aid to the wretched, the forlorn and the destitute, and who are, at the same time, possessed of true piety, shall, in the hour of dissolution, enjoy the approving testimony of their own conscience; and what is of still greater importance, the approbation of their Creator.[76]

Thanks largely to cotton, the region around Natchez teemed with affluence, yet every year the ladies went begging for funds. They did so not only by highlighting their accomplishments but by encouraging charity through multiple approaches. One was personal gratification, "the delightful pleasures" that benevolence could yield for the giver. If pleasure could not prompt action, then perhaps fear would convince citizens, in particular fear of losing "the approbation of their Creator." Between wealthy individuals

[75] Ibid., March 3, 1816.
[76] Ibid., March 4, 1822.

and Divine approval stood young indigent minors, and the Society continually strove to cultivate a greater personal investment in their welfare.

For this reason, Society members devoted much attention in annual reports to painting verbal portraits of the boys and girls in their care. In the above excerpt, the charity children appear as adjectives—"the wretched, the forlorn and the destitute"—but elsewhere they appear simply as "the orphans." In one report, they were given the additional modifiers of "wretched and friendless" and "bereaved," in case "orphan" did not evoke enough pity.[77] These characterizations were steeped in crisis, as though the fate of poor children hung precariously in the balance. Members also took care to cast the community as responsible for their fate. In one report, the Society appealed "to an enlightened and generous publick in behalf of those children who have no father or mother to protect them, no friends to support them; no monitor to warn them of the evil and danger of vice, or teach them the precepts of virtue and the principles of piety." Like the children in the wood, these minors teetered at the brink of ruin. Indeed, their very souls were in jeopardy. So were the souls of citizens who did not extend their sympathy.

Truth be told, many of the charity children were not actually orphans, at least not in the sense that the Female Charitable Society was portraying. For example, Cheslen and Selina Floyd still had their mother, the widow who was hired as matron. And the minutes reveal that, over the years, other children with mothers were regularly accepted into the Society's care. Losing a father could be as economically devastating as losing both parents, but as the above excerpt demonstrates, members painted all of their wards

[77] Ibid., March 6, 1820.

as *completely* orphaned. "Widows and orphans!" exclaimed one minister before the Providence Female Charitable Society; "There is something in the words which strikes upon the finest cords of sensibility, and calls forth such emotions, as vibrated on the heart of Pharaoh's daughter, when the rescued babe wept her into tears. Indulge the generous feeling."[78] There seemed to be no argument at the turn of the nineteenth century that these biblically wretched groups deserved assistance as well as pity. Like similar associations around the country, the Natchez Female Charitable Society crafted an idealized image of their benevolent targets in annual reports, sometimes in novelistic prose. "There is nothing which would afford the widowed mother, without fortune or friends, more earthly consolation in her last moments," reads one report, "than the thought, that there existed a Society of her own sex, which would feed, cloth, protect and educate her helpless children, after she had left them."[79] The Society took care in their public documents to create the impression that they assisted only the worthy poor: good children of good parents who had died before their time.

In reality, these widows and orphans were not so perfect. Mrs. Floyd, the widow hired by the Society as matron, continually irked the managers with her spendthrift ways. Benevolent women also logged complaints about the charity children. There were the sons of Mrs. Benedict, John and James, who were "excluded from all further care of the Society as ungovernable subjects."[80] Then there was the unnamed boy who proved "disobedient to orders given him" and labeled "ungovernable," though there is no

[78] Theodore Dehon, *A Discourse, Delivered in Providence, September 6, 1804, Before the Female Charitable Society for the Relief of Indigent Widows and Children* (Providence: Heaton and Williams, 1804), 18.
[79] From the annual report, printed in *The Ariel*, April 12, 1828.
[80] April 5, 1819, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.

mention of expulsion in his case.[81] Unruliness was not entirely confined to boys. Eliza Ellison ran away from the Society early on, and Ann Barrow was "discharged from all further care" for "refusing to live with Mrs Vancomfin," the matron at the time.[82] The members of the Female Charitable Society may have grumbled privately among themselves about their charitable objects, but they could not risk putting off subscribers and prospective donors. Therefore, in public the ladies portrayed their various charges as good and grateful, just like the shepherd of Salisbury and the dairyman's daughter.

Sympathetic Frontiers

Underlying the heart-wrenching appeals made in annual reports was an unspoken message to the affluent: "There, but for the grace of God, go I." Though Mrs. Eliza Burling was a widow of considerable means, the loss of her husband and concern for her four daughters may have stirred emotions that led her to join the Female Charitable Society.[83] A substantial inheritance as well as numerous family and acquaintance in the region kept the four young girls from becoming objects of the overseers of the poor. However, the same court that gave Mrs. Burling guardianship over her children was also responsible for binding out destitute minors. The proximity in space may have led her and others to reflect soberly upon the relative nearness in condition. And the presence of the charity children both at church and the annual meeting reinforced the similarities. White faces peering out from blue uniforms, however neat, represented to ladies and

[81] Ibid., July 3, 1820.
[82] Ibid., May 6, 1819.
[83] See chapter 1 for an extended discussion of Eliza Burling.

gentlemen an alternate course in life for their offspring. Benevolence might bring personal salvation as well as pleasure, but it could also be viewed as celestial payment for being spared a harsher earthly fate.

Church sermons about the poor, popular literature and drama about endangered children, and newspaper accounts of "stolen" children were conducive to the forging of personal bonds regardless of face-to-face encounters. Such became evident in the case of one Society subscriber, Mrs. Lydia Carter. At the first annual meeting, she affixed to the roll her pledge of $20, and that is the last mention of her in the Society's records.[84] Yet over the next few years her name became nationally known among evangelicals, not for her benevolence toward the poor children of Natchez but for ransoming a little girl she had never met—a little girl whose origin and appearance could not have been more different from her own.

In a twist on an old and fearsome tale among white frontier inhabitants, perhaps the most infamous instance of Indian abduction during the early republic involved a child who was herself Indian. The "little Osage captive," as she became known, was taken by a Cherokee war party some time in 1817, after her parents had been killed. A young missionary named Elias Cornelius was traveling through Mississippi when he came across the party, and according to his account, he recoiled in horror when the warriors displayed the scalps of the girl's slain parents. While the Cherokee were amenable to letting Cornelius take her to a mission, where she would be raised as a Christian, they would not give her up without receiving compensation. Alas, the amount they had in

[84] Her name and donation amount are listed at the end of the list of subscribers, which appears at the beginning of Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.

mind was far beyond the poor minister's reach. He continued on his journey but thoughts of the frightened girl never left him, even after he reached his destination. As he later wrote:

> On my arrival in Natchez, the capital of the state of Mississippi, I often related the history of the Little Osage Captive. It happened upon one of these occasions, that Mrs. Lydia Carter, a worthy lady who lived a few miles from Natchez, was present, and heard the recital. Her heart was touched with pity; and in a few days I had the satisfaction to hear from her, that if one hundred and fifty dollars would ransom the child, she was willing to appropriate that sum for the purpose.[85]

If Mrs. Carter had annually renewed her pledge to the Female Charitable Society, it would have taken nearly eight years for her donations to the poor white children of Natchez to equal what she gave on behalf of the Osage orphan. This particular act of benevolence made her renowned, as letters from Elias Cornelius were reprinted in evangelical magazines, including one in which he gleefully announced that "the poor outcast orphan has found a mother in the region."[86]

The orphan was named "Lydia Carter" as a gesture of gratitude to the woman who redeemed her.[87] After her rescue, little Lydia was taken not to her benefactress but to a place where, it was thought, she more properly belonged: the Indian Mission at Brainerd. There, she was "adopted" by white missionaries and "civilized" as a Christian along with many other Indian children. Because of her fame, however, the Osage nation eventually learned of her survival and demanded her return. The missionaries appealed to keep the girl—all the way to the President of the United States—but failed to retain custody.

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[85] Elias Cornelius, *The Little Osage Captive, An Authentic Narrative* (Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong and Crocker and Brewster, 1822), 23.
[86] From a letter dated December 24, 1817 printed in *The Panoplist, and Missionary Herald* 14 (February 1818): 95.
[87] Ibid.

Lydia never reached her natal Osage soil, for along the way she became ill and died. She departed a "hopeful convert," Cornelius took care to note in the account he wrote of the whole episode. In 1822, Cornelius published the story as a tract and, consequently, Mrs. Lydia Carter—the "benevolent lady," as she was known—became immortalized along with her protégée. The tract was distributed by evangelicals along with other stories designed to edify, inspire, and above all "awaken" readers.[88]

There is no record of any lady giving as much to the Female Charitable Society as Mrs. Lydia Carter gave on behalf of the little Osage captive. One gentleman pledged $100 after the first annual meeting and another gave a few hundred dollars several years later, but apart from these donations, the largest lump sums came from benefit performances, such as those arranged by Dr. King, Mr. Huntington, and Mr. Snell. What was it about the Osage girl that prompted Lydia Carter to such extraordinary generosity? Why did an Indian arouse more sympathy, in monetary terms, than white children living in her vicinity? And if white women and men in Natchez could feel for the plight of an Indian orphan, why did they evince so little sympathy toward the enslaved children in their community?

Historians of the antebellum South have increasingly wrestled with this last question over the past several years.[89] Indeed, the question hangs over the actions and writings of the Female Charitable Society and casts a gloom over its story. Many of the

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[88] "Journal of the Mission at Brainerd," *The Panoplist and Missionary Herald* 14 (December 1818): 565. Cornelius, *The Little Osage Captive, An Authentic Narrative*.

[89] See in particular Barbara L. Bellows, *Benevolence Among Slaveholders: Assisting the Poor in Charleston, 1670-1860*; Suzanne Lebsock *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860*; and Elna C. Green, *This Business of Relief: Confronting Poverty in a Southern City, 1740-1940*.

Society's members and benefactors had grown up among slaves and so had experienced a personal connection with them. As one visitor to the region noted, "In infancy, the progeny of the slave, and that of his master, seem to know no distinction; they play in their sports, and appear as fond of each other, as brothers and sisters in one family."[90] However, as adulthood approached, a deep gorge opened between them. Perhaps slaveowners felt that they daily exhibited "benevolence" toward their former playmates by providing basic necessities. But the treatment masters gave their bound dependents appeared anything but charitable. "I have repeatedly spoken of the slaves in the south and in the west," wrote another traveler to Natchez; "Some of them are treated kindly; but some suffer all the evils incident to this wretched condition. All the pride, all the ill-nature, all the petulance of man are frequently wreaked upon these friendless beings."[91]

Another tract that Daniel Smith brought to Natchez was Legh Richmond's *The Negro Servant*, whose eponymous protagonist resembles the Salisbury shepherd except for his color, pidgin dialect, and the address of "massa" toward his gentleman-patron.[92] While this evangelical tale hints at abolition, the primary theme is the cultivation of sympathy among white readers toward "the degraded African." As the main character shows, blacks could be strong Christians—even stronger when released from the pernicious bonds of enslavement.

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[90] William Bullock, *Sketch of a Journey Through the Western States of North America* (London: J. Miller, 1827) in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846*, vol. 19 (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1904), 130.
[91] Estwick Evans, *A Pedestrious Tour of Four Thousand Miles Through the Western States and Territories during the Winter and Spring of 1818* (Concord, NH: Joseph C. Spear, 1819) in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846*, vol. 8 (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1904), 331.
[92] Legh Richmond, *The Negro Servant* (Andover: The New England Tract Society, 1815).

When the Presbyterian elder wrote to Reverend Smith to relate how the tracts were being received in Natchez and its vicinity, he described at length one particular encounter with a "negro man kneeling behind a tree at prayer."[93] The elder conversed with the man about his praying and gave him a copy of *The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain* as well as *The Negro Servant*. "He received them with uplifted hands and eyes giving thanks to God for the kind gift," recounted the elder, in terms that seem reminiscent of the prose in the very tracts he was distributing. But unlike the "massa" in Richmond's story, the elder did not convey any sadness for the bound condition of the "servant." He simply comes across as pleased to find a black man who made religion his study and who vowed to turn others of his race "from sin and serve God."[94]

If the sentimental rhetoric of *The Negro Servant* cultivated sympathy for the plight of slaves among the white inhabitants of Natchez, no recorded evidence survives of it. The abolitionist current of the story appears to have been overlooked in favor of its other moral, that the lower orders should continually strive for greater piety and virtue yet content themselves with their born situation. Indeed, the women of the Female Charitable Society make no mention of slaves in their pitiful exhortations. Their fortunes depended on enslaved labor, and to cultivate sympathy for children of color might threaten to undermine the whole institution. While abolitionism was a burgeoning evangelical project in England and nascent in the American Northeast, it failed to rouse any enthusiasm in Mississippi during the early nineteenth century. At the same time that the Female Charitable Society was building public support for poor white children, at the

[93] From a letter dated October 11, 1816, printed in *The Religious Intelligencer* 1 (November 2, 1816): 364.
[94] Ibid. Interestingly, the elder makes no comment about the black man's ability to read.

same time that Indian boys and girls at Brainerd were attracting the interest of evangelical Southerners, black children stood largely beyond pity's reach. Indeed, their condition only grew worse.

Conclusion

"Sympathy unites, whom Fate divides," hopefully ends William Hill Brown's epistolary novel *The Power of Sympathy*.[95] Published in 1789 and widely considered the first American novel, this story centers on an orphan in jeopardy. According to the author, the story was "founded in truth," a claim commonly made to elevate narrative's public esteem. Hill dedicated his tale to the "Young Ladies of Columbia," who particularly stood to benefit from the moral lessons conveyed. Young women were also the likely readers of his work. Without question, the female penchant for fiction was a subject of passionate debate among Americans in the years after the Revolution. Novels were widely condemned for their insidious themes (Hill's story, for example, depicts a young couple who fall in love without realizing that they were actually brother and sister) as well as their power to excite emotions—emotions which could be put into action.[96] Benjamin Rush was among many early republic luminaries who condemned the reading

[95] William Hill Brown, *The Power of Sympathy* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 103. For a thorough consideration of the novel as well as the contemporary context of its production, see Elizabeth Barnes, "Affecting Relations: Pedagogy, Patriarchy, and the Politics of Sympathy," *American Literary History* 8 (Winter 1996), 597-614.

[96] The excoriation of novels and the pervasive condemnation of their female readership during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have been widely explored. One of the most insightful considerations of early republic views on women and novel-reading appears in chapter 8 of Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, 233-64.

of novels among females in particular, arguing that they excited only an "abortive sympathy" and therefore held precious little social value.[97]

The tracts distributed by evangelical missionaries throughout the country were frequently billed as adaptations of "true" events, yet they did not seem to attract the same censure as novels. To be sure, their ability to rouse readers—male and female, young and old, wealthy and poor—was characterized more as a merit than a shortcoming. The tracts brought to Mississippi by Daniel Smith all dealt with persons of "the better sort" lending their assistance to worthy and grateful members of "the lower orders." Christian benevolence was the link that joined the two groups together, whom fate had otherwise destined to live apart.

Affluent Mississippians had a long history of caring for their own, helping out friends and peers in need, and through taxation they also supported the poor. Beginning in 1816, however, benevolent women in Natchez pushed for a more active involvement in the welfare of the white poor, especially poor white children. To the founders of the Female Charitable Society, county relief seemed insufficient. Much of the Society's work was geared toward cultivating the belief that prepubescent boys and girls required

[97] "Let it not be said that the tales of distress which fill modern novels have a tendency to soften the female heart into acts of humanity. The fact is the reverse of this. The abortive sympathy which is excited by the recital of imaginary distress blunts the heart to that which is real; and, hence, we sometimes see instances of young ladies who weep away a whole forenoon over the criminal sorrows of a fictitious Charlotte or Werter, turning with disdain at two o'clock from the sight of a beggar who solicits in feeble accents or signs a small portion only of the crumbs which fall from their father's tables." Benjamin Rush in his famous 1787 discourse *Thoughts upon Female Education, Accommodated to the Present State of Society, Manners, and Government in the United States of America* in Frederick Rudolph, ed., *Essays on Education in the Early Republic* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965), 31. In 1790, Noah Webster likewise found little merit in novels, calling them "the toys of youth, the rattle boxes of sixteen." *On the Education of Youth in America* also in Rudolph, ed., *Essays on Education in the Early Republic*, 71.

an emotional investment on the part of citizens, an investment that demonstrated itself through voluntary financial contributions.

Tracts and novels created a culture of sympathy at the turn of the nineteenth century which linked inhabitants of different spheres. Stories about children fostered an especial sense of urgency that led many individuals to associative action, but as the Society members quickly realized, urgency had to be sustained in order for benevolence to flourish. Fundraising entertainments, charity sermons, and annual reports combined to further their cause, yet perhaps the most potent agent of sympathy was the charity children themselves. Under the civil system of relief these apprentice housekeepers and carpenters and boarders of paid caretakers were largely invisible, but benevolent women devised various ways to make them a focal point for the polite public.

Unfortunately, there are many gaps in the records pertaining to the Female Charitable Society's activities, but surviving accounts of related bodies around the nation help fill out the picture. One Natchez newspaper article about an event hosted by the Society's Catholic counterpart in Washington suggests that the spectacle created by benevolent women could penetrate those seemingly out of reach. Shortly before he took office in 1829, President-Elect Andrew Jackson visited the "Orphan's Fair" held by the Sisters of Charity in the nation's capital. The nuns had instructed their fifty girls to entertain the illustrious guest with a song. Upon hearing the last stanza, which contained a reference to his recently departed and deeply beloved wife, General Jackson's "firmness failed—he burst into tears." According to the reporter, his "voice, which could swell upon the roar of battle…was choked with deep emotion. At length mastering his

feelings by a powerful effort, he grasped the hand of the nearest orphan, 'yes my child, I'll be a father to you.'"[98]

Each report issued by the Female Charitable Society tells a story designed to prompt readers and hearers to a reaction similar to Jackson's at the Orphan's Fair: "The object of this Society is to confer the benefit of moral and religious instruction—to arrest profligacy, cherish virtue, strengthen the feeble, as well as to bestow the tender guardianship of a parent on the bereaved orphan."[99] Though not all the "objects of charity" belonging to the Natchez Society were orphans, the word clearly connoted sorrow and peril. The dense pine forests surrounding Natchez evoked a primeval dread, but apathy among well-to-do citizens represented a greater danger, so argued the ladies. Christ may have embraced the tax collector, but he revered the little children. Only by joining together as community of parents for the charity children would Mississippians be redeemed.

[98] *Mississippi State Gazette*, April 4, 1829.
[99] March 6, 1820, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.

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Charity Academy

Winthrop Sargent had just arrived in Natchez to take up his position as first governor of the Mississippi Territory when he received a petition from a local resident. A merchant and native of Scotland, John Henderson had lived under Spanish rule for more than twenty years, but the change of sovereignty seemed to matter little to him. Instead, he was more concerned about the religious and moral condition of the populace. Professing satisfaction that the United States Congress supported the creation of churches and schools in new territories, he beseeched Governor Sargent to ensure that sufficient land was appropriated, for such institutions were sorely wanting in Mississippi:

> But being as yet, in an infant state, and our population not yet equivalent to the extensiveness of our Country, renders it difficult to raise salaries adequate to induce a sufficient number of persons properly qualified for these offices to come among us, whose moral conduct and conversation, as well as doctrinal principles, might be conducive to the maintaining of good order in the Government, and rendering our Offspring not only useful but ornamental to society by spreading among us a taste for polite literature.[1]

A month after receiving the petition, Sargent forwarded it to the United States Secretary of State, who presented it to the Senate in March 1799. The following December, it was

[1] Letter from John Henderson to Governor Winthrop Sargent, dated November 26, 1798. A transcript of the petition as well as notations about its progress appears in Clarence Edwin Carter, comp. and ed., *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, vol. 5. The Territory of Mississippi, 1798-1817 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1937), 50-51. Biographical information about Henderson appears on Ibid., 50, fn 95. Henderson had written the petition on behalf of an assembly of fellow citizens.

"ordered to lie on table." Then the letter was referred to a committee, and nothing more was done.[2]

Not much more could be done. Certainly, Congress had demonstrated an interest in promoting education. The Land Ordinance of 1785 designated a lot in every territorial township for a public school, and article three of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 stipulated, in words echoed by Henderson, that "religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged."[3] In practice, however, Congress was too preoccupied with innumerable other tasks with respect to organizing the western territories and administering a new nation to fulfill these legislative aspirations. The diffusion of knowledge, whether pious or secular, would have to result largely from private, regional efforts rather than federal action.[4]

If Mississippians were upset by the apparent disregard for their petition, they must have been pleased by the subsequent turn of events. By 1800, Presbyterian missionaries had made their way to that far southwestern corner and found support for new churches

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[2] Ibid.

[3] From article three of the Northwest Ordinance, quoted in Robert M. Taylor, Jr., ed., *The Northwest Ordinance, 1787: A Bicentennial Handbook* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1987), 61. One-sixteenth of public lands for the support of schools, as per the territorial ordinances, still had not been appropriated as of 1814, when the Mississippi territorial legislature wrote to the United States Congress to pray for authorization to make such an acquisition. Clarence Edwin Carter, comp. and ed., *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, vol. 6. The Territory of Mississippi, 1798-1817 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1938), 480-81. On the promotion of education in the Land Ordinance of 1785 and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, see William O. Swan "The Northwest Ordinances, So-Called, and Confusion," *History of Education Quarterly* 5 (December 1965): 235-40. For more comprehensive overviews of this legislation, see Peter S. Onuf, *Statehood and Union: A History of the Northwest Ordinance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

[4] See Paul H. Mattingly and Edward W. Stevens, Jr., *"...Schools and the Means of Education Shall Forever Be Encouraged": A History of Education in the Old Northwest, 1787-1880* (Athens: Ohio University Libraries, 1987).

among the predominately Protestant populace.[5] John Henderson, himself a Presbyterian, helped found a church in the then territorial capital of Washington in 1807 and even served as an elder.[6]

At the same time, strides were made with respect to the establishment of schools in the territories. One of the earliest was Reverend Dr. MacDowell's "Academy," founded in Natchez during the spring of 1800. In the pedagogical parlance of the day, "academies" typically went far beyond rudimentary knowledge to encompass all the arts, sciences, and languages that distinguished the polite classes. Most were devoted to the instruction of males, though female academies were becoming increasingly popular. For years, wealthy parents in the hinterlands had been sending their children to the East, where these elite institutions abounded, especially since the end of the Revolution.[7] Now the East was coming to them. A missionary of learning, MacDowell pledged to teach "every branch of literature which is generally taught in the Atlantic States," in particular

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[5] Clayton D. James discusses early attempts to establish religion in Natchez. With respect to Anglo-American settlers, a group led by Congregationalist minister Samuel Swayze organized the first Protestant "church" in 1774 and conducted home services until his death ten years later. When Spain took control of the region in 1779, Catholicism became the established religion, and priests were brought to the area, but the predominately Protestant population showed little interest or inclination toward that faith. *Antebellum Natchez*, 38-40. Numerous contemporary observers of the community at the turn of the nineteenth century note the general indifference toward religion and preoccupation with material acquisition of the populace. Natchez was an early missionary destination for the Presbyterian General Assembly; the Carolina Synod sent three individuals there in 1800; Ashbel Green, *A Historical Sketch or Compendious View of Domestic and Foreign Missions in the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America* (Philadelphia: William S. Marten, 1838), 19. James discusses notes that at least two other Presbyterian churches were built in the region from 1805-1807, though none in Natchez prior to Smith's arrival; *Antebellum Natchez*, 244-45.

[6] In the subscription list for the Salem (later called Pine Ridge) Church, Henderson is listed as having given $25, one of the largest single donations. Z/0962.000: Pine Ridge (Presbyterian) Church Records, MDAH.

[7] On the emergence of these institutions of higher learning, Theodore R. Sizer, *The Age of the Academies* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1964) remains a classic study. Kim Tolley provides a thorough overview of the development of academies as well as their classics-oriented curriculum in "Mapping the Landscape of Higher Schooling, 1727-1850" in Nancy Beadie and Kim Tolley, eds., *Chartered Schools: Two Hundred Years of Independent Academies in the United States*, 1727-1925 (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2002). Tolley holds the Ursuline convent of New Orleans, founded in 1727, to be the earliest "American" academy.

those subjects "which are requisite to prepare young gentlemen for embarking in the higher sphere of life."[8] Educational opportunities for young gentlemen expanded further in 1802 when the Mississippi legislature created Jefferson College in the town of Washington near Natchez.[9] Additionally, young ladies received opportunities of their own as various scholastic entrepreneurs launched female and co-educational institutions around the territory.[10]

Mississippians established a number of Protestant schools and churches, yet when Samuel Mills and Daniel Smith traveled through the region in 1815, they determined the region to be almost primitive. "The religious sentiments of the inhabitants are incorrect," they stated bluntly in their report; "and a great stupidity, as it respects a concern for the salvation of the soul, appears generally to prevail. A reason, which answers in part for this inattention is obvious, *the people perish for lack of knowledge*."[11] The missionaries were not speaking hyperbolically. From their perspective, ignorance kept inhabitants from grace, which consequently led to eternal damnation. Congress had included the

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[8] His advertisements appear in *Green's Impartial Observer*, May 5, 1800 and June 14, 1800.

[9] Despite his reformatory zeal, Governor Claiborne could not surmount the inattention of trustees and dearth of funding, and the college languished for years. Jefferson College finally opened for instruction in 1811, but even then its situation remained precarious. On the college's early, troubled history, see William T. Blain, *Education in the Old Southwest: A History of Jefferson College Washington, Mississippi* (Washington, MS: Friends of Jefferson College, 1976), 1-33.

[10] Apart from Jefferson College, which endured well into the twentieth century, most of the schools founded in Mississippi during the early republic lasted only a year or two. For instance, in September 1808, Jacob Rickhow advertised his services to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic to children of both sexes for the amount of two dollars per month. By March 1810, a Mrs. Elliot had taken over his building and launched a school for ladies, which offered the rudimentary subjects in addition to polite feminine accomplishments of needle-work, painting, and drawing. The advertisements appear respectively in *The Weekly Chronicle*, September 23, 1808 and March 12, 1810. Newspapers remain the best source of information pertaining to schools founded in Natchez from 1800-1830. While the lifespan of particular institutions is difficult to determine, advertisements do seem to indicate that schools opened and closed with some frequency.

[11] Samuel J. Mills and Daniel Smith, *Report of a Missionary Tour Through That Part of the United States Which Lies West of the Allegany Mountains* (Andover: Flagg and Gould, 1815), 24.

encouragement of "religion, morality, and knowledge" in the Northwest Ordinance because these pursuits were conducive to good government and individual happiness. To evangelicals, they were the means to everlasting life.

A renewed sense of urgency pervaded the region at the turn of the nineteenth century, and citizens mobilized once again to improve their lot. As John Henderson helped establish the first Presbyterian church in Natchez, his wife Selah and daughter Isabella organized the Female Charitable Society and were elected to serve, respectively, as Second Vice President and Treasurer.[12] "The Primary object of this Society shall be to give instruction to poor children," states the Society's constitution, which was drafted at the first meeting in March 1816.[13] Several of the founders were related to men responsible for building the new Presbyterian church and securing Daniel Smith as minister—indeed, the two voluntary projects were intimately intertwined. Benevolent women believed that with regular church attendance and charity schooling, the poor children of Natchez would adopt "correct" religious sentiments, prepare for honest and respectable adulthood, and gradually turn the community into a place to be admired rather than feared.[14]

But how exactly were poor boys and girls to be instructed? And what form would the charity school take? The Female Charitable Society constitution is vague on the

[12] The first Presbyterian church in Natchez was organized in 1817 and met at John Henderson's house until a permanent structure was built. D. Clayton James, *Antebellum Natchez* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 245.
[13] March 12, 1816, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[14] John Henderson is listed at the top of the list entitled "Admissions to the Communion of the Church." Z/0771.000: First Presbyterian Church (Natchez) Record Book, MDAH. The names of Selah and Isabella Henderson also appear on that page as well as in the list of subscribers to the Female Charitable Society. These women were elected to their offices at the first meeting. March 12, 1816, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.

particulars, stating only that "the duty of the managers shall be, to provide an instructor and a school room, to search out needy Children, and to select the most deserving objects, to superintend their education, and to make such regulations for the government of the School as they may deem necessary."[15] Just as the members modeled their association after others, adopting similar fundraising and administrative techniques, they could have followed the educational work of benevolent women elsewhere. For example, in 1802 the ladies of Portsmouth, New Hampshire organized a small school that offered free, rudimentary instruction to indigent girls, equivalent to what they would have received as apprentices.[16] The Natchez Female Charitable Society sought to teach the rudiments to poor boys as well—under the same roof where genteel children pursued a liberal education and paid handsomely for the privilege.

The "charity academy" founded by the Female Charitable Society did not last long, but the story of its rise and fall is important, for it underscores the experimental nature of organized benevolence. Giving instruction to poor children was not as straightforward as the constitution implied. Many complex decisions had to be made. What subjects should they learn? How long should they attend school? Should girls receive the same instruction as boys? As we shall see, territorial law provided answers to these questions for those minors who were apprentices. However, when the ladies inquired into the condition of the poor they found that the execution of that law and the state of education in general left much to be desired. As they labored to improve the

[15] Ibid.
[16] In his charity address delivered upon the first anniversary, Joseph Buckminster gives an account of the school as well as the ladies' achievements. *A Discourse Delivered before the Members of the Portsmouth Female Charity School, October 14, 1803* (Portsmouth, NH: N.S. & W. Peirce, 1803).

prospects of indigent boys and girls, Society members were motivated by Christian charity and perhaps republican ideals as well. Here, the benevolence of George Washington may have served as a model, for the "Pater Patriae" had supported a school where male and female, rich and poor learned their lessons under a single roof. Of course, the "universal" school promoted by Washington and attempted—briefly—by the Natchez Female Charitable Society included only children who were white. But endeavoring to surmount barriers of class in the early republic was as innovative as overcoming divisions of gender, though less palatable among the polite.

Not everyone in the Society was in accordance with the experiment of forming a "charity academy," and its eventual demise probably had as much to do with internal disapproval as external difficulties. For several years the officers struggled with how to carry out their charitable aim, until they abandoned comprehensive education altogether. They also gave up their initial focus of running a school, deciding that poor children were more apt to learn religion, morality, and knowledge when instruction extended beyond a few hours in a classroom and took place in a setting more domestic than scholastic.

Washington's Educational Legacy

> There was something in the countenance of this chieftain which no artist could portray—an eye whose keen glance could change the result of a battle, and yet whose mildness would allure a child…The widow and the fatherless were found and relieved by his charity, and future generations are to be instructed by his legacies. His greatness we can neither describe or imitate; but his goodness, his benevolence, and his charity, are our law.[17]

[17] *Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer*, February 21, 1816.

Mississippi had only recently become part of the United States when, in 1800, inhabitants "buried" George Washington on the riverbank, joining a sorrowful nation in honoring the Pater Patriae. A soldier who had served under the glorious commander-in-chief was so overcome by sorrow during the ceremonial funeral that he took his own life.[18] The pain from the loss of Washington lingered over the years and deepened with the realization that the Revolutionary generation was dying out and a vast, uncertain future lay ahead.[19]

Americans continued to honor Washington every year on his birthday. In February 1816, the editor of the Natchez newspaper recalled his famous achievements and extolled some that were less celebrated, namely that the acclaimed "Father of his Country" was also a benevolent man. Indeed, the allusion to "the widow and the fatherless" was not simply a metaphor but a reference to Washington's personal charitable project as well as an experiment in education: providing free instruction to the poor children of Alexandria, Virginia.[20]

Two years had passed since George Washington relinquished command of the Continental Army, so as a private citizen he traveled to Alexandria to meet with the trustees of a new academy. In fact, he had helped found the institution and enrolled his

[18] The funeral took place on April 22, 1800, two months after the date when a presidential order called for Washington's death to be publicly observed. Sergeant McLeod was reported to have committed suicide out of "a momentary impulse of sensibility." Details of this curious episode of George Washington's Mississippi funeral appear in *Green's Impartial Observer*, May 5, 1800. On this phenomenon of national mourning, see Gerald Edward Kahler **"**Washington in Glory, America in Tears: The Nation Mourns the Death of George Washington, 1799--1800" (PhD diss., The College of William and Mary, 2003). For more on the national veneration of Washington, see Andrew Burstein, *Sentimental Democracy: The Evolution of America's Romantic Self-Image* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999), 195-99.

[19] See Glenn Wallach, *Obedient Sons: The Discourse of Youth and Generations in American Culture, 1630-1860* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997); Alfred F. Young, The *Shoemaker and the Tea Party: Memory and the American Revolution* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999); and Peter C. Messer, "From a Revolutionary History to a History of Revolution: David Ramsay and the American Revolution," *Journal of the Early Republic* 22 (Summer 2002): 205-33.

[20] *Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer*, February 21, 1816.

nephews there.[21] The purpose of this visit in December 1785 was to launch a charity school. "It has long been my intention to invest, at my death, one thousand pounds current money of this State...for the purpose of educating orphan children who have no other resource—or the children of such indigent parents as are unable to give it," he later wrote to the trustees.[22] To extend the life of his bequest, only the interest could be applied, and he pledged to supply fifty pounds per annum until the principal was finally conferred. Furthermore, he recommended that the Washington School, as it would be called, and the Alexandria Academy share governance by the same board and occupy the same three-story building, as a more expedient arrangement.[23] Washington advised, however, that the charity school should focus primarily on "that kind of education which would be most extensively useful to people of the lower class of citizens."[24]

Biographies of George Washington have largely overlooked this episode, but during the early republic his role in founding a charity school seems to have been better known.[25] As quoted above, the Natchez editor wrote in February 1816 that "future generations are to be instructed by his legacies."[26] Perhaps a coincidence, the Female

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[21] According to his diary, George Steptoe Washington and Lawrence Washington were there by November 25, 1785. Excerpts reprinted in William Buckner McGroarty, "Alexandria Academy," *William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine* 20 (April 1940): 255.

[22] George Washington to the Trustees of the Alexandria Academy, December 17, 1785. George Washington Papers, series 2, reel 51, Library of Congress.

[23] The academy took up the first two floors while the school was situated on the third story. McGroarty, "Reverend James Muir, D. D., and Washington's Orphan Wards," 516.

[24] George Washington to the Trustees of the Alexandria Academy, December 17, 1785. George Washington Papers, series 2, reel 51, Library of Congress.

[25] William Buckner McGroarty's articles comprise the most detailed accounts on this episode I have been able to locate. Recent biographies of Washington make no mention of the events McGroarty describes. See, for example, Richard Norton Smith, *Patriarch: George Washington and the New American Nation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993); Henry Wiencek, *An Imperfect God: George Washington, His Slaves, and the Creation of America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003); and Joseph J. Ellis, *His Excellency: George Washington* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004).

[26] *Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer*, February 21, 1816.

Charitable Society organized and held its first meeting shortly after the publication of this birthday eulogy. Yet combined with the evangelical revival taking root in the region, there may have been heightened potency in such statements as "his goodness, his benevolence, and his charity, are our law."[27] As president, Washington had strongly encouraged "institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge,"[28] and for a time it seemed that instructional parity between the white classes garnered as much interest as instructional parity between the sexes.[29] Thomas Jefferson, for example, proposed that poor children be instructed alongside the wealthy as a means to fulfill the highest ideals of the new republic. While serving in the Virginia legislature, he drafted a bill outlining a system of schools evenly distributed throughout the state and funded through tax

[27] Ibid.

[28] From Washington's "farewell address," written in 1796 just before he left office. Quoted in Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980). Cremin notes that Washington and other advocates of "general" education had had white children in mind.

[29] Numerous Americans wrote on the subject of education in the wake of the Revolution. Benjamin Rush particularly championed the improvement of female education on grounds that women were the first instructors of their children. Judith Sargent Murray wrote copiously on the subject, arguing that society was better served when girls were taught a liberal rather than ornamental curriculum. Female academies and seminaries, as well as some that were co-educational, became increasingly popular. Several scholars have studied the enhancement of female education during the early republic. See, in particular, Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press,1980; New York: W.W. Norton, 1986), chap. 7; Sharon M. Harris, ed., *Selected Writings of Judith Sargent Murray* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Margaret A. Nash, *Women's Education in the United States, 1780-1840* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); and Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). Instructing poor and wealthy children alongside each other also had proponents. In 1790, Noah Webster advocated the establishment of publicly-supported institutions that would teach students, regardless of wealth or status, not only the rudiments but also information (e.g., law, commerce, government) necessary to functioning in a republican state. Noah Webster, "On the Education of Youth in America," in Frederick Rudolph, ed., *Essays on Education in the Early Republic* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965), 66. English émigré and autodidact Robert Coram concurred with Webster in an essay published the following year, asserting that "instruction in arts as well as sciences…ought to be secured by government to every class of citizens, to every child in the state." Robert Coram, "Politcal Inquiries: To Which is Added, a Plan for the General Establishment of Schools throughout the United States" in Ibid., 113. For more on the early history of "universal" education, see Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983).

revenues. Introduced in 1778, the bill was never adopted, an outcome he attributed to the exigencies of the war. Even in peace time its principles did not gain traction, and by the early nineteenth century, state-supported education seemed a dead issue.[30] The instruction of America's poor would have to depend on the generosity of individual citizens.

Washington's beneficent example seems to have inspired emulation, particularly among women. That ladies would be inclined toward charity education is not so surprising given that, in the early years of the American republic, the instruction of young children became increasingly regarded as a female occupation.[31] Female authority over children was further enhanced by a rising sentiment among evangelicals that mothers were largely responsible for instilling religious and moral principles in the young. And the work of associations like the Natchez Female Charitable Society shows that, in the early nineteenth century, women began to extend their influence over the children of the poor. While forming a charity school in Natchez was a novel undertaking, it was in many ways a fitting exercise in republican virtue and Christian charity for women who were themselves the recent products of educational reform.[32]

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[30] In his "Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge," Jefferson argued that a liberal education would enable citizens to protect their rights. He particularly mentions the instruction of poor children, for as he noted in the bill, "it is better that such should be sought for and educated at the common expense of all, than that the happiness of all should be confided to the weak or wicked." In 1804, William Wirt opined that its failure resulted from a diminishment of "the comprehensive views and generous patriotism" which had inspired the notion in the first place. Cremin, *American Education, 1607-1783*, 439-443.

[31] Janet Carey Eldred and Peter Mortensen argue that women at the turn of the nineteenth century were schooled largely to serve as principal educator of their sons and daughters, *Imagining Rhetoric: Composing Women of the Early United States* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002). See also Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic*.

[32] Mary Kelley notes that women who engaged in reform and organized benevolence between 1797 and 1820 often drew from the first generation of females to be schooled at academies and seminaries and receive a vigorous liberal education; *Learning to Stand and Speak*, 29. She also discusses at length the

A couple of months after Washington's 1816 birthday commemoration and the first meeting of the Female Charitable Society, the officers enrolled their first group of children at school.[33] They could have quickly and cheaply organized a "dame school" by renting a house and employing a capable woman to teach rudimentary subjects in the manner that had been popular throughout colonial British America.[34] The widow Mrs. Floyd had been hired by the ladies as "matron to the orphan children," and if capable, she might have been prevailed upon to instruct all those in the Society's care. The Society, however, was intent on a professional scholar. As a result, thirteen children—seven boys and six girls from ages six to eleven, including the son and daughter of Mrs. Floyd—were placed in the school recently opened by Robert White.[35] Sending the children to an established local school was both convenient and economical. Mr. White had already rented a building and prepared it for the reception of students. He also granted the

changes in the instruction of women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century to prepare them for the front line in educating future citizens. In *Women of the Republic*, Linda K. Kerber coined the term "Republican Mother" to convey the role that women increasingly assumed after the Revolution. On the religious and moral authority perceived of women among evangelicals, see Philip N. Mulder, *A Controversial Spirit: Evangelical Awakenings in the South*, 142-44.

[33] May 6, 1816, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.

[34] Also known as "petty schools," these informal arrangements gave poor women a means of subsistence while providing a venue for basic instruction as well as child care. Cremin, *American Education, 1607-1783*, 129, 129 fn19. See also, Thomas Woody, *A History of Women's Education in the United States* (New York: Octagon Books, 1966), 138.

[35] Robert White's school opened on February 26, 1816, according to his advertisement in the *Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer*, February 14, 1816. While the Female Charitable Society minutes refer to the children being at the school of "T. White," it is possible that the first initial was mistaken (no evidence has been found of another instructor at this time with the surname of White). May 6, 1816, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR. In this minutebook entry, the names of the children enrolled at school are listed along with some of their ages.

Society a 25% discount on his tuition rate. Moreover, he had worked out a curriculum and, supposedly, had the ability to lead young pupils through it.[36]

Among White's new charity students was Elizabeth Willcox, a girl of around nine or ten, who had been bound out by the overseers of the poor the previous year.[37] Perhaps her indentures had been revoked or perhaps the Society had singled out the apprentice as a deserving object. Whatever the case, the girl went from a promise of basic instruction as the day's work allowed to basic instruction as the primary occupation of the day. Under territorial law, masters and mistresses were required to teach apprentices a vocation as well as the ability "to read, write, and cipher as far as the rule of three," usually a few months at the "night schools" so that education did not interfere with labor. The "three R's" as an instructional program had long been a fixture of apprenticeship indentures.[38] The mandate of literacy was a legacy of laws enacted in New England during the seventeenth-century to ensure that all citizens could read the scripture and

[36] According to the minutes, the Society paid $2.50 per month, or $7.50 per quarter, whereas White's advertisement lists $10 per quarter. May 6, 1816, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR. *Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer*, February 14, 1816.

[37] Elizabeth Willcox's age is recorded in a list of charity children at the end of FCSN Minutebook I. On May 14, 1815, a Betsey Wilcox "living with Mrs. Phelps" was returned to the orphan's court and ordered to be bound out to a new master or mistress; Orphan's Court Minutebook I (April 1803 to January 1815), ACCC.

[38] From Chapter 36 "A law directing the mode of binding apprentices," P.L. Rainwater, "Sargent's Code," *The American Journal of Legal History* 11 (July 1967), 312. Ian M. G. Quimby notes that by the latter half of the eighteenth century indentures became increasingly specified as to the type and amount of schooling the apprentice was promised. Reading writing and "cyphering" were the rudimentary subjects; *Apprenticeship in Colonial Philadelphia*, 70-71. Carl F. Kaestle refers to these subjects as "common" or "elementary" education in *The Evolution of an Urban School System: New York City, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 1-3. The indenture of Luther Bradley, bound out in Adams County in 1808, stipulated that he would be "instructed to read and write and cipher at the night schools during four months of his Apprenticeship." *James McConnell and Samuel Patterson v. Gideon Hopkins, Nathan H. Luce, and Luther Bradley*, 1811, box 45, file 57, Historic Natchez Foundation, Natchez, Mississippi (hereafter cited as HNF). Robert Francis Seybolt notes that the practice of sending apprentices to night schools, usually in the winter, since early colonial times in *Apprenticeship and Apprenticeship Education in Colonial New England and New York* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 94-97.

capital laws.[39] Writing, of course, was increasingly essential to commerce as was basic math. The ubiquity of "the rule of three" in apprenticeship indentures signaled that figuring simple proportions was deemed an essential skill for workers.[40] The Female Charitable Society likely kept their charges to the "three R's" at Mr. White's school, but the children learned their lessons during the day and were exposed to other branches of instruction. Mr. White taught stenography and bookkeeping as well as the polished subjects of Latin, English, and French.[41] Considered indispensable among "the better sort," these subjects were probably not offered to charity children, as they were hardly practical for those destined to manual trades.

Mr. White had little time to instruct his charity pupils in anything, because after a few months he "declined keeping school."[42] For the charity children, that is. He had not declined keeping school altogether for he was still teaching in January 1817, albeit at a different building.[43] If White had found the business of educating poor children disagreeable, the Female Charitable Society apparently found his school no more satisfactory. Within days of enrolling the children, the officers held a special meeting to

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[39] In 1642, the English settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony adopted a law that would have a profound and lasting effect for American children, one that laid the foundation for compulsory, universal schooling. The failure of parents to instruct sons and daughters in reading could result in the removal of those children and their placement with other guardians. A provision specific to apprenticeship was adopted in 1671, though it seems simply a reinforcement of the earlier statute. Seybolt, *Apprenticeship and Apprenticeship Education*, 36-41.

[40] "The rule of three direct teacheth, by having three numbers given, to find a fourth, that shall have the same proportion to the third, as the second has to the first," from Nicolas Pike, *A New and Complete System of Arithmetic, Composed for the Use of the Citizens of the United States* (Newburyport: John Mycall, 1788). Pike's arithmetic was widely printed throughout the country and editions of it were published well into the nineteenth century.

[41] *Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer*, February 14, 1816.

[42] September 2, 1816, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.

[43] On January 2, 1817, Robert White wrote a letter to the president and selectmen (the mayor and city council) of Natchez seeking permission to conduct his school in city hall. A note on the letter indicates that the request was found unreasonable and was therefore not granted. Natchez Municipal Records, vol. 17, series 2051, MDAH.

discuss "the great necessity of sending for a teacher fully qualified to teach the objects of Charity."[44] Most likely, the officers viewed Mr. White's school as a temporary measure from the outset, preferring instead to form an institution that they could shape and manage themselves.

At the special meeting, the ladies unanimously resolved to solicit the assistance of the Reverend Daniel Smith in procuring a proper instructor. In spite of his previous complaints about clergymen of other denominations in the Mississippi Valley, the Presbyterian minister was willing to set aside sectarian differences and nominate a Baptist preacher for the position.[45] The Society must have likewise approved of the Reverend Benjamin Davis's scholastic and evangelical credentials, for they engaged him.[46] This "fully qualified" instructor came at a price: $500 per year.[47] Tuition at Mr. White's school would have totaled $390 if the thirteen students had remained there for twelve consecutive months. Compared to other schools in the region White's fees were rather high, and yet the ladies decided to pursue a markedly more expensive course—one that would have consumed half of their total funds at the time.[48] But then they were

[44] May 14, 1816, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[45] During his 1815 trip to the region with Samuel Mills, the men reported that "Baptist and Methodist preachers are to be met with occasionally. The *former*, in many instances, do not inculcate upon their hearers the importance of observing the Sabbath day as holy time. Neither do they enjoin upon parents the duty of religiously educating their children. The belief of the *latter* is well known." Mills and Smith, *Report of a Missionary Tour*, 24.
[46] Davis is first mentioned at the meeting on June 4, 1816, when the officers "agreed to a trial of him." On August 7, they began to make arrangements to hire him permanently with the assistance of Daniel Smith. Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[47] The managers "unanimously" agreed to authorize Daniel Smith to procure a teacher. Ibid., May 14, 1816. Benjamin Davis was first hired on trial according to the minutes of June 4 and formally hired according to the minutes of November 4.
[48] The Pinckneyville Academy, for example, advertised tuition rates of as little as five dollars per quarter for students in the junior class, half of what White charged for the same instruction. *Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer*, May 8, 1816. Given the erratic financial records in the Female Charitable Society minutebook, it is difficult to determine precisely how much money was actually

supporting a more complicated educational institution than White or anyone else had ever attempted in Natchez.

The "Lancastrian" Method

"All my exertions here have prospered beyond my most sanguine expectations," wrote Daniel Smith to a friend in Boston in the spring of 1817. This letter, like his other communications from Mississippi, was subsequently printed and reprinted in a number of evangelical publications.[49] That religious revival thrived in Natchez was news to be circulated and celebrated. In complete contrast to the gloomy reports he had made during his first visits to the region, Smith presented copious examples of the "Divine Spirit" taking hold of the populace, devoting special attention to the accomplishments of benevolent women:

> The charitable Society, established by the Ladies, flourishes; it was formed last year for the instruction of poor children: it has raised more than $2000, and is doing much good. It has occasioned the establishment of a Lancastrian School under Mr. Davis, the Baptist Minister which is likely to be an extensive blessing to this place. The Academy also is very successful, having more than eighty scholars from the most respectable families; and the number is every week increasing. A year ago there was not a good school in the place; now almost all the children are under the care of well qualified and pious instructors.[50]

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received during the first few years. Adding the figures listed under "annual subscriptions" and "donations" yields an amount of around $1000 (including the donation from Dr. King). There are several notations, however, that sums promised in 1816 were not paid until the following year. At any rate, $500 seems to have been a substantial amount of money for the Society to expend less than a year after founding. Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR (account appears at the beginning of the ledger).

[49] *Boston Recorder* 2 (May 13, 1817): 88. Also appears in *The Christian Monitor* 4 (April to June, 1817): 54 and *The Religious Intelligencer* 2 (June 2, 1817):15.

[50] *Boston Recorder* 2 (May 13, 1817): 88.

Most readers would assume that the academy and school were two physically separate entities, yet by all accounts both occupied the same building.[51]

On October 23, 1816, Benjamin Davis announced in the local newspaper the opening of the "Lancaster Academy" in the city of Natchez.[52] Citizens were probably aware of it long before the advertisement was placed because a building designed to "comfortably accommodate two or three hundred students" would have been difficult to miss.[53] Not even Jefferson College, Mississippi's premier seminary, could accommodate so large a student body—there was no need for the space, as a few years earlier only sixty-eight students were enrolled.[54] The difficulty in preparing the academy's structure and obtaining for it such items as books and "a new set of London globes" took time and money, which explains why Davis took nearly five months from his initial hire to open the institution, and why the Female Charitable Society's investment in him was so substantial. There was no mention of the Society in this or any other notice, but its patronage of Davis was common knowledge as Smith's letter makes clear.

The uniqueness of this new academy became evident in the next published notice, which ran for four successive weeks in February and March of 1817.[55]

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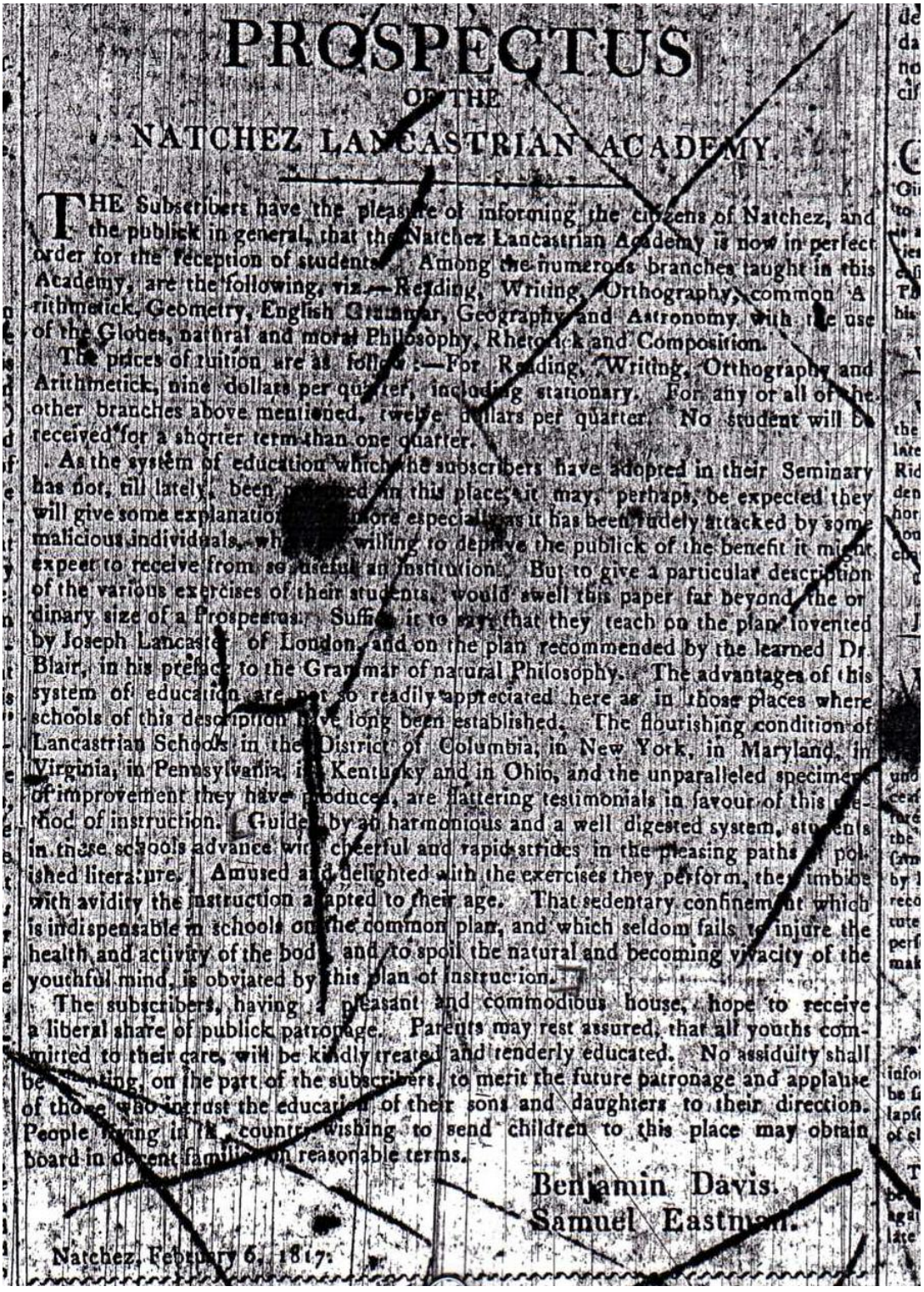
[51] For example, on November 4, 1816, the minutes note that the children were at last sent "to school to Mr. Davis." The next meeting, held on December 2, 1816, convened "in the school room of Mr. Davis." Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[52] *Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer*, October 23, 1816.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Expansion of Jefferson college finally began in the summer of 1817; Blain, *Education in the Old Southwest*, 27, 33.
[55] The advertisement first appeared on February 6 and printed five additional times through March 19, 1817; *Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer*. Subsequent references to the Natchez Lancastrian Academy prospectus come from this source.



PROSPECTUS

OF THE

NATCHEZ LANCASTRIAN ACADEMY.

THE Subscribers have the pleasure of informing the citizens of Natchez, and the publick in general, that the Natchez Lancastrian Academy is now in perfect order for the reception of students. Among the numerous branches taught in this Academy, are the following, viz.—Reading, Writing, Orthography, common Arithmetick, Geometry, English Grammar, Geography and Astronomy with the use of the Globes, natural and moral Philosophy, Rhetorick and Composition.

The prices of tuition are as follows:—For Reading, Writing, Orthography and Arithmetick, nine dollars per quarter, including stationary. For any or all of the other branches above mentioned, twelve dollars per quarter. No student will be received for a shorter term than one quarter.

As the system of education which the subscribers have adopted in their Seminary has not, till lately, been [illegible] in this place, it may, perhaps, be expected they will give some explanation [illegible] more especially as it has been rudely attacked by some malicious individuals, who [illegible] willing to deprive the publick of the benefit it might expect to receive from so useful an institution. But to give a particular description of the various exercises of their students, would swell this paper far beyond the ordinary size of a Prospectus. Suffice it to say, that they teach on the plan invented by Joseph Lancaster of London, and on the plan recommended by the learned Dr. Blair, in his preface to the Grammar of natural Philosophy. The advantages of this system of education are not so readily appreciated here as in those places where schools of this description have long been established. The flourishing condition of Lancastrian Schools in the District of Columbia, in New York, in Maryland, in Virginia, in Pennsylvania, in Kentucky and in Ohio, and the unparalleled specimens of improvement they have produced, are flattering testimonials in favour of this method of instruction. Guided by an harmonious and a well digested system, students in these schools advance with cheerful and rapid strides in the pleasing paths of polished literature. Amused and delighted with the exercises they perform, they imbibe with avidity the instruction adapted to their age. That sedentary confinement which is indispensable in schools on the common plan, and which seldom fails to injure the health and activity of the body, and to spoil the natural and becoming vivacity of the youthful mind, is obviated by this plan of instruction.

The subscribers, having a pleasant and commodious house, hope to receive a liberal share of publick patronage. Parents may rest assured, that all youths committed to their care, will be kindly treated and tenderly educated. No assiduity shall be wanting, on the part of the subscribers, to merit the future patronage and applause of those who intrust the education of their sons and daughters to their direction. People living in the country wishing to send children to this place may obtain board in decent families on reasonable terms.

Benjamin Davis.
Samuel Eastman.

Natchez, February 6, 1817.

Figure 1

No other school had placed such a lengthy and expensive advertisement in Mississippi newspapers. Printed in the center of the page, the "Prospectus of the Natchez Lancastrian Academy" consumed a width of two columns and nearly forty lines of text. In addition to a slightly altered name, the institution had a new assistant instructor: Samuel Eastman from New England.[56] The advertisement explained that Davis and Eastman would run the school, which had been organized according to the plan developed by Joseph Lancaster, a Londoner whose educational precepts were being adopted around the United States. New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland, the District of Columbia, Kentucky, and Ohio were among the places mentioned in the prospectus. According to Davis and Eastman, the Lancastrian method was producing "unparalleled specimens of improvement" in each state. To be sure, the prospectus promised a very comprehensive curriculum at the Academy. For nine dollars per quarter students could study the rudimentary subjects of "Reading, Writing, Orthography, and common Arithmetick," and for three more dollars they could also pursue "Geometry, English Grammar, Geography, Astronomy with the use of Globes, natural and moral Philosophy, Rhetorick and Composition."[57]

Though explicit about the curriculum, Davis and Eastman are vague about what exactly the Lancastrian method involved. Instead, they offer general praises. "Guided by an harmonious and a well digested system, students in these schools advance with cheerful and rapid strides in the pleasing paths of polished literature," they assert, adding

[56] Eastman's origin is noted in an advertisement in *Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer*, February 12, 1817.
[57] *Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer*, February 6, 1817.

that by contrast the "sedentary confinement which is indispensable in schools on the common plan, and which seldom fails…to spoil the natural and becoming vivacity of the youthful mind, is obviated by this plan of instruction."[58] No details of this plan appear in the prospectus. Perhaps Davis and Eastman felt, as many Americans at the time did, that anything imported from Britain must be superior. Certainly, the name "Lancastrian" (or "Lancasterian" as it was spelled elsewhere) had a handsome Old English ring to it.

In spite of its remarkable length, the prospectus published in the Natchez newspaper says little about how boys and girls would be taught. Later, a bit more light is shed on the Lancastrian method, thanks to the publication of an address delivered by Samuel Eastman at the Academy's first quarterly examination held on March 28, 1817. To attract additional patrons and refute the attacks of certain "malicious individuals," the instructors had invited the community to view "the literary improvement of the students."[59] Examinations were common social occasions at the turn of the nineteenth century, yet theirs was enhanced by the addition of a candlelight oration on the virtues of education. The entire text of Eastman's speech was printed in the newspaper, along with a declaration of support penned by four prominent gentlemen, at least two of whom were related to members of the Female Charitable Society. They lavished the schoolmasters with praise and called their academy "the most beautiful and complete order of education we have ever witnessed."[60]

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[58] Ibid.
[59] *Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer*, April 9, 1817.
[60] William Snodgrass bore a connection to Charity Snodgrass and Edward Turner was the husband of Eliza B. Turner. The other two signers were Jeremiah Hunt and Woodson Wren; the latter was also a clerk of the Orphan's Court who would later take an indigent boy as an apprentice. The gentlemen echoed the sentiments of the eloquent teacher, yet they avoid mentioning the charitable association responsible for its

Much of the speech lauds the advancement of learning in Natchez and throughout the country. The greatest triumph, in Eastman's opinion, was the improvement of female education. "Amiable and accomplished daughters of Columbia, you are, indeed the pride of your country," he extolled, calling female ignorance a hallmark of primitive society. Conversely, the diffusion of knowledge among "the fairest part of creation" heralded a golden age.[61] There is no mention of embroidery, music, or painting—subjects commonly pursued by young ladies—offered at the Lancastrian Academy. Instead, male and female students studied alongside one another and pursued the same liberal curriculum.

Once again, Lancaster's methods are cloaked in oblique references and generalities, but Eastman hints at charity as he presents himself and Reverend Davis more as philanthropists than educational entrepreneurs:

> The noble pleasure of doing good—the joyful reflection that our labors have been instrumental in directing a large number of the rising generation in the walks of knowledge and the way of virtue—have been instrumental in laying the foundation of their future respectability and usefulness, and qualifying them to act with dignity the parts which may be assigned them on the broad theatre of future life, will yield a more exalted satisfaction than is in the power of any other consideration to bestow.[62]

In other words, the advantages of education were not confined to the individual. Eastman averred that learning both refined and advanced society, and he cited several examples of the community's progress in the nearly twenty years since joining the United States. One was the establishment of schools, such as the one in which they were all presently sitting.

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existence. "Than the education of youths, nothing is more honourable," they asserted to the public, adding that Davis and Eastman deserved full honors as well as generous patronage. *Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer*, April 9, 1817.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

Another was the founding of religious institutions, such as the new Presbyterian church. He also pointed to the rise of benevolence: "Here, Heaven-born Charity, ever amiable and kind, raises from the dust the sons of poverty, and the daughters of affliction; here, she extends her hand to wipe the tear from the eye of the orphan, and the widow's heart is made to sing for joy."[63] The audience would have found this allusion to the Female Charitable Society conspicuously familiar. Many had probably heard similar words when attending the Society's first annual meeting, held in that very same building, only two weeks earlier. But visitors who had not previously witnessed the charity children "pursuing their different studies" may have been struck by the sight of them.[64] Poor children, including apprentices, were not typically found in academies, and their presence among the paying pupils during the examination must have made a strange, perhaps unsettling, display.

The Natchez Lancastrian Academy opened with greater fanfare than the illustrious Jefferson College, which opened nearly ten years after its inception and only because the Washington Academy gave up its name and its schoolhouse.[65] The first few months of the Lancastrian Academy were marked by elaborate advertisements and manifestos detailing an impressive pedagogical scheme. However, despite the extensive preparations, the considerable investment in time and money, and all the celebration attending the school sponsored by the Female Charitable Society, it closed within a year.

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[63] Ibid.
[64] March 3, 1817, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[65] Though chartered in 1802 by the Mississippi territorial assembly, Jefferson College never received sufficient financial support for construction to commence. In December 1810, the trustees of the Washington Academy in Washington, Mississippi transferred the building to the trustees of Jefferson College. The college finally opened in January 1811. Blain, *Education in the Old Southwest*, 1-25.

Why did the Natchez Lancastrian Academy fail when it had shown such promise? The dearth of documentary evidence leaves the reason open to speculation. To be sure, the instability of the teaching staff could have played a role. In May 1817, barely a month after delivering his stirring oration, Samuel Eastman abruptly left Mississippi to study divinity in Philadelphia.[66] Benjamin Davis soon procured a new teacher, one who taught Greek as well as Latin, but by the autumn of that year he faced a far greater disruption.[67] Early in the autumn of 1817, the first of many yellow fever epidemics seized the city.[68] A Baptist missionary in New Orleans reported to his superiors that "Natchez has received an awful visitation. About three hundred of its citizens were in a short time numbered with the dead, being cut off by the malignant fever!!"[69] While many communities in the Lower Mississippi Valley were also struck, the disease had proved "more fatal in Natchez than in any other place."[70] The Female Charitable Society met on the third Saturday in September when the epidemic was already underway, then suspended meetings until January.[71] After the four-month hiatus, the officers resumed their business, including the disbursement of payments to the matron, who had cared for a number of charity children throughout the fall. There is no mention of the boys and girls

[66] Eastman was reportedly baptized in the Mississippi River and linked up with Baptist minister James Randalson, who gave an account of his plan in *The American Baptist Magazine and Missionary Intelligencer* 1 (January 1818): 278.
[67] Davis advertised the addition of the unnamed instructor in *Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer*, August 2, 1817. There is no mention of Samuel Eastman.
[68] The yellow fever epidemics of 1817 and 1819 will be detailed in chapter 5.
[69] From James Randalson in his letter written on December 30, 1817, printed in *The Latter Day Luminary* 1 (February 1818): 34.
[70] Ibid.
[71] September 20, 1817 and January 26, 1818, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.

having attended school.[72] Given the terrible state of Natchez, it seems unlikely that any kind of systematic instruction could have been conducted.

The Society's records yield no indication as to why or when the school closed. No advertisements for the Lancastrian Academy appear after the epidemic had subsided. Moreover, by the spring of 1818, Benjamin Davis was living in New Orleans.[73] There are signs that problems with the school had begun earlier, that it did not have the full support of the Female Charitable Society membership. Besides the lists of charity children, there are no records indicating who might have attended the Academy. Such records would point to the families who supported the curriculum and the experiment of educating rich and poor children under the same roof. But we do know the names of four children who were *not* enrolled: the children of one of the Society's officers.

Elected Third Directress of the Female Charitable Society at the first annual meeting in March 1817, Eliza Burling, wealthy widow and founding member, likely attended the public examination at the Lancastrian Academy held a couple of weeks later. She would not have seen her daughters there, for Caroline, Eliza, Harriet, and Sophia Burling were enrolled in the nearby Natchez Academy. Having opened in January 1817, months after Benjamin Davis had been hired and the charity children placed under his tutelage, this school was administered by Richard Pearse and his wife, D. H. Pearse, who was also the Society's new secretary.[74] According to the newspaper advertisements, the Pearses taught all the subjects mentioned by Davis and Eastman, though for fifteen rather

[72] January 26, 1818, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[73] In a letter dated March 20, 1818 to the Board of Missions, the Reverend James Randalson mentions that Benjamin Davis was currently residing in New Orleans. Printed in *Religious Remembrancer* 5 (August 1818): 200
[74] *Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer*, January 15, 1817.

than twelve dollars per quarter, and they also offered the quintessential ladylike pursuits of needlework and drawing,.[75]

As legal guardian to her minor children, Mrs. Burling was required to document all the expenses pertaining to their upbringing, which were covered by her late husband's estate. A receipt from the Natchez Academy shows that the four girls were studying there as early as February 1817 and attended throughout the summer. In addition to the high quarterly fees, there were numerous other costs relating to instruction. Each girl had her own set of books, which covered a wide array of subjects such as spelling, grammar, and geography as well as atlases and "sacred extracts." There were also slates, paper, and copy books. From the available evidence, it appears that Mrs. Burling spent around $190 for six month's schooling for her four daughters—almost half of what the Female Charitable Society paid for an unlimited number of charity children to attend the Lancastrian Academy for an entire year.[76]

Eliza Burling sent her children to a rival school rather than the one she had helped found, though it seems the Natchez Academy shared a similar religious objective with the Female Charitable Society. In a letter to the editor of the *Boston Recorder*, a popular evangelical publication, Academy co-founder Richard Pearse announced that great things were happening in his institution. The untimely demise of one of the pupils had given cause for celebration: not only did she appear to have converted in her last moments, her death was inspiring awakenings among the other pupils. Pearse said nothing about

[75] Ibid.
[76] The two receipts for the Natchez Academy cover two academic quarters from February 11 through August 11, 1817. During that time, around $27 was spent on books and $12 on stationary and "contingencies." The books are itemized on the back of the first receipt. Tuition cost $15 per quarter. Burling Family Papers, 1810-1827, NTC.

scholastic endeavors. Instead, he focuses entirely on pious developments and devotes special attention to a recent occurrence, which resembled what his own wife and the mother of the Burling girls were doing in their own spare time:

> A Tract Society has been formed in our school. While we were deliberating on the best method of getting tracts into circulation, and regarded the difficulties in our way as almost insurmountable, our young ladies of their own accord, and without our knowledge, formed themselves into a society for the purpose. We had not even dared to suggest the thing to them, lest the hint prove premature, and defeat our wishes. Thus the Lord relieved us from our perplexities, and showed us, that he could work without us. The society is wholly confined to our school and in their first quarterly subscription they have raised nearly 30 dollars. "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name O Lord, be the glory."[77]

As girls, they had probably played with dolls as a means of cultivating maternal abilities, and now the young women of the Natchez Academy were learning organized benevolence. Tender age did not hinder the capacity of the pupils to help others. The personal means and social connections of their parents enabled them to pool resources quickly and raise a not inconsiderable sum. The apparent ease with which the little tract society formed was probably a result of the students' similar upbringing and condition: what the young ladies witnessed at home they emulated at school.[78] That the Pearses incorporated Christian charity into their school's curriculum appears to have met with favor. The Lancastrian Academy had strong charitable associations as well, but perhaps they were too strong for Mrs. Burling.

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[77] From a letter dated September 10, 1817 from Richard Pearse to the editor. *Boston Recorder*, 2 October 21, 1817): 180.

[78] On the daughters of the genteel raised to be young ladies, see Philip Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearin Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 289-90

Anyone familiar with the writings of Joseph Lancaster might wonder at the descriptions Benjamin Davis and Samuel Eastman gave of his methods in the prospectus. Though he was a year away from his promotional tour of the United States, Joseph Lancaster had written extensively, and his treatises were widely published both in Britain and the United States.[79] A copy of one of his books is listed in the inventory of William Dunbar, one of Natchez's most distinguished citizens and whose daughter, Ann Postlethwaite, was a founding member of the Female Charitable Society.[80] Which book is not specified, but nearly all of them delineated his "monitorial system" of education, a system designed specifically for the children of the poor.[81] Publications such as *The British System of Education* outlined in extremely meticulous detail every aspect of his free schools, which were flourishing in England. From the placement of the desks to the recommendation of "strings" for hats so as avoid the expense of shelves or wall-hooks, no time-saving or cost-saving approach was spared. What truly made his schools economical and accessible was his pedagogical plan: a single schoolmaster could teach hundreds of children by creating a hierarchy of "monitors" among the student body and making them responsible for the instruction of those who were less advanced. Moreover, the only subjects offered were reading, writing, and arithmetic to the rule of three—in

[79] Carl F. Kaestle, ed., *Joseph Lancaster and the Monitorial School Movement: A Documentary History* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1973).
[80] In the inventory taken upon the death of William Dunbar, one of the books listed is "Lancaster on Education." Inventory Record Book I, ACCC, 117.
[81] One such example is Joseph Lancaster, *The British System of Education: Being a Complete Epitome of the Improvements and Inventions Practised at the Royal Free Schools, Borough-Road, Southwark* (London: Joseph Lancaster and Longman and Co., 1810).

other words, those branches suitable for boys and girls destined for service, labor, or trades.[82]

In addition to the undeniable link between the monitorial method and charity schooling, a system connected with Joseph Lancaster may have occasioned other objections based on his suggested program of discipline. In his books, Lancaster laid out a veritable catalog of punishments for unruly behavior. For especially egregious transgressions, students could look forward to being pilloried, shackled, or thrust into "the basket" and suspended from the schoolhouse roof like a bird in a cage.[83] Even a cursory glance through Lancaster's writings revealed that his stated mode of keeping students in line was quite different from the "cheerful and rapid strides in the pleasing paths of polished literature" promised by Benjamin Davis and Samuel Eastman. In his candlelight oration, the latter had extolled the "congenial influence of healthful exercise" promoted at the Lancastrian Academy as opposed to the "pernicious force of much confinement, and many stripes" characteristic of other institutions.[84] But Natchezians familiar with Lancaster's published methods might have been disturbed by the association nonetheless. Disapproving looks and verbal admonitions were steadily replacing the rod as corrective instruments for genteel children throughout the United States, and in Mississippi the thought of corporal punishment must have been particularly irksome. Indeed, there are indications that emotional rather than physical forms of juvenile discipline took early root in the South where correctional violence was

[82] Ibid.
[83] The basket is listed as a punishment for boys only. Lancaster, *The British System of Education*, 34. Joseph Lancaster, *Improvements in Education, as It Respects the Industrious Classes of the Community* (London: Darton and Harvey, 1803).
[84] *Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer*, April 9, 1817.

increasingly associated with slaves. By the early nineteenth century, to beat one's sons and daughters with the same hand that was used to beat one's "servants" was becoming a degradation.[85]

Judging by the proliferation of Lancasterian schools in the United States during the early nineteenth century, including one in New Orleans, most Americans seem to have found the man's methods tolerable for at least one segment of the population. Or perhaps his writings were not carefully perused.[86] Less than twenty years after the Washington School in Alexandria was founded, the illustrious patron's name was dropped for "Lancasterian" to reflect the adoption of the method that had, by then, become a pedagogical sensation.[87] The curious phenomenon of this educational movement requires more scrutiny than can be given here. On the whole it seems that these schools were formed primarily for poor children, but Natchez was different. Only there, it seems, was "Lancastrian" used in conjunction with "Academy," a designation usually reserved for institutions of advanced learning and associated with children of the upper classes.

If Daniel Smith's report was accurate, the Lancastrian Academy at Natchez did not want for pupils. That "eighty scholars" were enrolled signifies considerable public support, but how consistent was that support? For some reason, the institution launched

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[85] Philip Greven notes that genteel Southerners did not attempt to curb the will of their children with corporal punishment for such measures were reserved almost exclusively for slaves, a practice that genteel children tended to emulate in their own adulthood. On the rise of affectionate childrearing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries see *The Protestant Temperament*, 269-74, 276-81.

[86] James A. Randalson wrote that the school had been opened some time in the summer of 1817. *The Western New York Baptist Magazine* 2 (May 1818): 178-79.

[87] William Buckner McGroarty, "Alexandria's Lancasterian Schools," *William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine* 21 (April 1941): 113.

by the Society failed to survive the terrible disruption caused by yellow fever, though Jefferson College and other, more exclusive institutions managed to resume their operations. Mrs. Burling did not explain why she sent her daughters to the Natchez Academy instead of the institution sponsored by the society she helped found, but the curriculum may have had something to do with it. The academy run by Benjamin Davis and Samuel Eastman boasted a rigorous scholastic program that did not discriminate on the basis of gender. In other words, elite boys and girls studied the same subjects, from astronomy to rhetoric, just as charity children pursued a similar, albeit simpler, path of instruction. By contrast, the Pearses offered a more tailored instruction at their school. In addition to a liberal curriculum, girls could undertake the more distinctly feminine subjects of embroidery and painting. Furthermore, children at the Natchez Academy were not taught together. As the Pearses noted in their advertisement, "masters and misses are accommodated in separate buildings, so as to be free from any annoyance from each other."[88] Mrs. Burling had a demonstrated penchant for more traditional modes of education, as she had originally sent her daughters to Madame Florian's Academy for ladies in New Orleans. And when she moved her family to Boston, she enrolled the three younger girls in the Jamaica Plain Seminary, where they continued to pursue needlework, drawing, music lessons, and even dancing. "The expense is greate," Mrs. Burling wrote to her attorney in Natchez in 1819, "but the advantages are equal if not superior to what could be given at any other school in this part of the world."[89]

[88] *Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer*, January 15, 1817.
[89] Elizabeth W. Burling to James C. Wilkins, November 15, 1819. This letter and receipts for Madame Florian's Academy as well as the Jamaica Plain Seminary are found in Burling Family Papers, 1810-1827, NTC.

Clearly, Mrs. Burling deemed a curriculum of feminine accomplishments more advantageous to her daughters' future prospects than a purely scholastic, gender-neutral program, as offered by the Lancastrian Academy.

Mrs. Burling's acceptance of a high office in the Female Charitable Society while that Academy was being built suggests her approval of it for the children of other Natchezians. The large initial enrollment also suggests widespread community approbation, but for some reason that support waned. Elite citizens who had endorsed gender-neutral education (or at least willing to give it a try) pulled out, though no discussion of the Lancasterian Academy's failure has come to light. However, the troubles of the Washington School and Alexandria Academy, a comparable and roughly contemporaneous institution, were more carefully noted. After founding his charity school in December 1785, George Washington regularly sent his promised annual donation, even while absorbed in the formation of a new federal government and his subsequent election as President of the United States. It was in that capacity and while living in Philadelphia, recently ravaged by yellow fever, that he wrote to the trustees in February 1794, requesting—sternly—information about the institution's progress. Years had passed, he said, and never had the gentlemen sent him any kind of report.[90] Within days, Washington received a response. "I am sorry to say," wrote the head of the board, "that the reputation of the School is not now, and has not for some time been such as I

[90] George Washington to the Reverend Dr. James Muir, February 24, 1794. George Washington Paper, series 2, reel 7. Library of Congress. The Reverend Dr. James Muir was the president of the board of trustees of the Alexandria Academy and Washington School. Among Washington's papers is a letter to him from Muir dated March 14, 1791, informing him about the school and listing the thirteen boys and seven girls enrolled. George Washington Papers, series 4, reel 100, Library of Congress. J. H. Powell, *Bring Out Your Dead: The Great Plague of Yellow Fever in Philadelphia in 1793* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

could wish." He went on to say that fifty pounds per annum had proved an insufficient amount to keep a good teacher, and the scheme to pool resources with the Academy had only made the situation worse. "Parents in good circumstances are unwilling that their Children should associate with those of a lower Class," he told the President bluntly. "This operates against the Washington School, and prevents its increase." Though the trustee predicted the eventual demise of the Alexandria Academy, he professed greater hope for the charity school despite its many problems. Indeed, it was imperative that the Washington School succeed, for "the object of the charity is very worthy as it rescues from ignorance a considerable number, and lays the foundation for their becoming useful citizens."[91] Both the Academy and the School somehow managed to continue, but when the Lancastrian model was adopted in 1812, the latter was finally separated physically from the former.[92]

In the general diffusion of knowledge, there were two currents running through Mississippi during the early nineteenth century: a trend toward the gradual erosion of old divisions and the belief that some of those divisions should be more deeply entrenched. Mrs. Burling, for example, wished her daughters to become accomplished ladies—perhaps with a greater command of liberal subjects than she herself had enjoyed, but by no means did she desire her girls to become classical scholars. With respect to education, she may have also supported a clearer distinction of social rank, though there were others in Natchez who promoted greater inclusiveness, namely Benjamin Davis and Samuel

[91] From a letter dated March 3, 1794, reprinted in William Buckner McGroarty, "Reverend James Muir, D. D., and Washington's Orphan Wards," *William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine* 20 (October 1940): 518-20.
[92] McGroarty, "Alexandria's Lancasterian Schools," 113.

Eastman. The idea to launch a comprehensive academy rather than a charity school may have come from these men, though the financial support of the Female Charitable Society certainly indicates at least tacit approval from benevolent women. In fact, Reverend Davis went on to diffuse knowledge more generally after leaving Natchez. In the spring of 1818, he was appointed by the Mississippi Society for the Baptist Missions Foreign and Domestic as a circuit preacher "for the coloured people in New-Orleans," chosen specifically for the post because of his "faculty for teaching the blacks."[93] By August, he had formed a new Baptist church in that city "consisting of eight white, and twenty-four coloured members"[94] It is possible that in addition to yellow fever and institutional instability, the Lancastrian Academy diminished in public favor because the principal schoolmaster pushed the spread of religion and learning in a way that Natchezians could not condone, including the women who made his venture possible in the first place.

Conclusion

The cultivation of the rising generation was one of the most widely discussed issues in the years after the Revolution. Despite the general consensus that successful democratic government depended on an educated populace, there was much debate over how that education should be conducted. What subjects should children learn? How long should they attend school? Should girls receive the same instruction as boys? Questions that had been the concern of individual families became a national imperative,

[93] In a letter from the Reverend James Randalson dated March 20, 1818, printed in *Religious Remembrancer* 5 (August 1818): 200.
[94] *The American Baptist Magazine and Missionary Intelligencer* 2 (March 1819): 79.

and Revolutionary luminaries such as Benjamin Rush took them up in earnest. Rush particularly championed the improvement of female education, as women—specifically mothers—were the first instructors of their children. Judith Sargent Murray, who would retire to Natchez in 1819 to be near her daughter and brother, wrote copiously on the subject, similarly arguing that society was better off when girls were taught a liberal rather than ornamental curriculum. Female academies and seminaries, as well as some that were co-educational, became increasingly popular, and instructional parity between the sexes a favored notion.[95]

Achieving educational parity between the classes, however, seemed less readily obtainable during the early republic. While the Natchez Female Charitable Society did not advocate instruction for white children irrespective of condition, its members, who had grown up during the first flush of enhanced instruction for young women, experimented with a comprehensive institution. Perhaps the Society hoped, as George Washington had, that the success of elite education would help support charity schooling. Society members could not have been entirely displeased with the Lancastrian Academy, for at the annual meeting held there in March 1817, the ladies found the charity children "to have progressed very rapidly for the short space of time some had been there."[96] In June, one of the managers reported that "they had improved in reading and spelling since

[95] Much of that discussion and debate can be found in Frederick Rudolph, ed., *Essays on Education in the Early Republic*, which contains the seminal writings of Benjamin Rush and Noah Webster among other American intellectuals who published their thoughts and recommendations for the direction of education in the years after the Revolution. For analysis of this discourse as well as the tremendous changes with respect to education in the early republic, see Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876*, 103-245; Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, 189-231; and Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860*.

[96] March 3, 1817, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.

she examined them last month," and the same manager found them making further progress in September.[97] Moreover, a few weeks after the public examination, a letter from Davis was received by the Society pertaining to his payment for the remaining half year's tuition, and the treasurer was readily authorized to disburse the funds.[98] There are, however, certain inconsistencies. For instance, the minutes show only one meeting held at Davis's school, though the officers did assemble on at least one occasion at the rival Natchez Academy. And when meetings resumed after the yellow fever had subsided, the children were attending "the school of Messrs. Sawyer and Smith," where they were found to be "improving."[99]

Unfortunately, the ladies were rather mute on what the charity children were studying. The only subjects mentioned while they were at the Lancastrian Academy were reading and spelling.[100] There was no instruction in astronomy or rhetoric or Greek for the orphans. Instead, it seems that they were confined to the basic branches: the "three R's" that were also statutorily prescribed for apprenticeship indentures, but with a key difference: charity children spent the bulk of their time at lessons whereas apprentices typically labored during the day and learned what they could at night. Sending the children to the school run by Sawyer and Smith was the third and final attempt of the Society to achieve its objective by enrolling the children in schools that were also open to

[97] Ibid., June 7 and September 20, 1817.
[98] "To the Female Charitable Society. I should be pleased to know if it is in the desire of the Society, that the verbal agreement made between Mrs. Smith and myself shall stand good. If you wish a written agreement of the balance for the other half year can be advanced. Yours affectionately, B. Davis." His letter is dated the same day of the meeting, Ibid., April 12, 1817. The officers expressed a desire to obtain a written agreement, but other than that there seem to have been no qualms about paying him the remaining $250.
[99] Ibid., June 1, 1818.
[100] Ibid., June 7, 1817.

the paying public. By September 1820, the managers had arranged for the matron to serve as both teacher and caretaker of the charity children at a rate of $6 for tuition and $3 for boarding—if these rates were monthly, she would have received what some caretakers had been paid more than ten years ago for support alone.[101] Taking care of young boys and girls and tending to the numerous daily household demands probably did not leave much time for instruction, and the matron may have employed her own "monitorial" methods so that the children taught each other.

Around the time that the matron also became schoolmistress, the Society began to state more explicitly what kind of instruction the children in their care were receiving. "The rudiments of an English education," "the elementary branches of education," "the plainer branches of education"—while the wording varied, the message conveyed to the public in annual reports was clear.[102] Charity children would be schooled in the same subjects promised them under the bonds of apprenticeship, or in the words of Washington, "that kind of education which would be most extensively useful to people of the lower class of citizens." Another crucial instructional difference between charity children and apprentices, however, was that the Society expanded the notion of rudimentary education to include "the precepts of virtue and the principles of piety."[103] If not in substance, the manner of schooling was changed by benevolent women from one of delegating education to masters and mistresses to one that more assiduously pursued evangelical ideals and was governed by a central female authority.

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[101] $8 was crossed out. Ibid., September 3, 1817. As discussed in Chapter 2, William Henry King received $8 per month for boarding Cynthia Williams in 1809.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid., March 4, 1822. From the 1822 annual report.

Over time, benevolent women in Natchez shifted their focus away from charity schooling as a principal end, in part because the children faced greater obstacles than tuition in acquiring an education. Some objects of charity were from the country and would have been unable to walk to the schoolhouse, and they probably lacked the means to travel as well as funds to cover room and board. Those who lacked the money could conduct their lessons at home, but studies also entailed the loss of valuable labor—every hour spent in lessons was one less hour devoted to supporting the household. Masters and mistresses were required by law to negotiate these difficulties and provide apprentices a certain amount of schooling, but poor boys and girls who were not bound out generally had to make do with instruction they received from caretakers, if they received any instruction at all.

There was also the problem of clothes. Sartorial provisions are usually absent from studies of early American education, but for poor children they could prove a key determinant of educational success or failure. George Washington had anticipated the potential problem when setting up his charity school in Alexandria in 1785, for he permitted the trustees to apply part of his donation toward "cloathing."[104] However, he was overly sanguine about how far his annual fifty pounds would extend. Using surplus funds for expenditures beyond education was out of the question because that amount could not even procure a regular teacher for the Washington School, as he was informed nearly ten years later. Besides, there were greater needs among the students. At least two orphaned pupils "attended ill during the winter, being badly clothed" and the other

[104] Letter dated December 17, 1785, George Washington Papers, series 2, reel 51, Library of Congress.

twelve children were apparently not much better off. "Could a way be devised for clothing as well as educating these Children, and could a person be prevailed upon who is capable of educating them to attend to this," conjectured the head trustee, "it would bring the school into repute."[105] In other words, students who were ill-clad could not diligently attend to their lessons, and a classroom full of threadbare children impaired a school as much as an incompetent teacher, especially when they were studying under the same roof as children of means.

As we shall see, the Female Charitable Society likewise found clothing a problem with respect to instructing poor children. Indeed, officers had little time to discuss their educational attainments because providing basic care seemed more urgent. For a female association to expand from schooling to full support was not without precedent. The ladies of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, for example, had begun a charity school in 1803 and then disbanded it one year later. Explained the minister who addressed the public on their behalf, "several obstacles, which it is not expedient to enumerate, arose, and it was thought to be an object of greater importance to form an asylum, where something like a parental care might, at all times, be extended to as many, as the funds of the establishment might admit of receiving."[106] Something like parental care is precisely what benevolent women in Natchez began to provide once they realized that an academy, no matter how ambitious or well organized, was insufficient for cultivating poor young minds.

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[105] McGroarty, "Washington's Orphan Wards," 519-520.
[106] Timothy Alden, *A Discourse Delivered Before the Members of the Portsmouth Female Asylum* (Portsmouth, NH: J. Melcher, 1804), 10-11.

4

"The Cheerless Support Allow'd by Our Laws"

On July 8, 1794, James Smith of Bayou Sarah bound two of his sons as apprentices to his brother William to learn "the Art or Mystery of a *Silver-smith*."[1] Despite the fact that the Smith boys resided in a Spanish province, the two documents were modeled after English indentures and the governor at Natchez, Don Manuel Gayoso de Lemos, signed his approval.[2] According to the indentures, Prestwood and John Smith, ages seven and five, were legally bound to their uncle until they turned twenty-one. Until then, each pledged that "his Master's secrets he shall faithfully keep, Matrimony he shall not contract, neither shall he absent himself at any time without leave, hurt to his said Master he shall not do, nor suffer it to be done by others, but in all things as a good and faithful *Apprentice* shall he demean himself." In becoming master to his nephews, William Smith assumed his own set of obligations. He promised to instruct the boys in his calling, give them a certain amount of schooling (two years for the elder and three

[1] Apprenticeship indentures for John Smith and Prestwood Smith, Provincial and Territorial Documents, 1759-1813, NTC. While the document mentions July 8, 1794 as the date, it was not until July 9 that the indentures were confirmed as legitimate by the alcalde and subsequently approved by the governor. The text of both documents is identical, though their appearance is slightly different. The indenture of the younger son, John Smith, is more elaborate than that of Prestwood.

[2] Madrid hoped to maintain Natchez as a buffer against the United States, which had encroached upon the community early in the Revolution and showed every indication of wishing to do so again. In order to cement the loyalty of the Anglo-American populace, "the dons" granted unprecedented tolerance toward the English language and the Protestant religion as well as their legal and civil institutions. This tolerance appeared particularly pronounced under the governorship of London-educated Manuel Gayoso de Lemos, who administered Natchez from 1787 until the end of Spanish provincial rule in 1798. Jack D. L. Holmes, "Law and Order in Spanish Natchez, 1781-1798," 25 *Journal of Mississippi History* vol. 25, no. 3 (1963): 187, 190-91 and Jack D. L. Holmes, *Gayoso: The Life of a Spanish Governor in the Mississippi Valley*, 1789-1799 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 4.

years for the younger), and provide them "fitting and convenient" necessities such as room, board, and clothing.[3]

Both the text and appearance of these handwritten indentures evoke an earlier age: the initial words are crafted in a bold Gothic style with calligraphic flourishes, and the script bears the elegance of an illuminated manuscript. By its appearance, the document reflects not a mundane transaction but rather a very special occasion. Indeed it was, for the Smith boys were entering a tradition that stretched back to the Middle Ages. The artisanal guilds that prevailed in Britain, Natchez's main cultural parent, did not find purchase across the Atlantic, but apprenticeship was a principal mode of vocational training and rudimentary education for children of the middling class throughout colonial America.[4]

Apprenticeship was also common for children of the poorer classes in Mississippi, and binding out indigent and orphaned children occurred while Natchez was part of

[3] Indentures for John Smith and Prestwood Smith, Provincial and Territorial Documents, 1759-1813, NTC.
[4] One of the few monographs devoted to the subject of apprenticeship in England remains Olive Joyce Dunlop, *English Apprenticeship and Child Labour* (London, T. F. Unwin, 1912). An excellent study of apprenticeship from its English origins to American adaptations is Robert Francis Seybolt, *Apprenticeship & Apprenticeship Education in Colonial New England & New York* (New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1969). Seybolt also includes transcriptions of several indentures from the medieval period and later. Ian M. G. Quimby, *Apprenticeship in Colonial Philadelphia* (New York: Garland, 1986) thoroughly details the institution and features a picture of a typical colonial indenture. See also Carl Bridenbaugh, *The Colonial Craftsman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961) and W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Craft Apprentice from Franklin to the Machine Age in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). While there have been numerous recent works on American artisans and craftsmen, most have tended focus on the New England and the Mid-Atlantic, though the Southern region of the United States is gaining attention. See, for example, Michele Gillespie *Free Labor in an Unfree World: White Artisans in Slaveholding Georgia, 1789-1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000). Much of the scholarship on Southern artisans has emerged in article form, such as Christine Daniels, "WANTED: A Blacksmith Who Understands Plantation Work: Artisans in Maryland, 1700-1810" *The William and Mary Quarterly* (October 1993): 743-67. An entire section is devoted to the experiences of artisans in the South (including essays by Gillespie and Daniels) in Howard B. Rock et al, *American Artisans: Crafting Social Identity, 1750-1850* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

Spain.[5] That tradition was codified when Mississippi became a United States territory at the end of the eighteenth century, among the many statutes adopted to govern the region was "A law for the binding of apprentices," which, contrary to the comprehensive title, pertained only to the institution as a form of juvenile relief (for the full text of the statute, see Appendix].[6] Mary Eveson, an "Orphan female Child," was one of the first apprentices bound under this law. In 1801, the four-year-old girl was brought before the court by an Adams County overseer of the poor and placed with a man named Patrick Connelly, who would serve as her master until she turned eighteen.[7] Though her indenture no longer exists, a transcription of the text appears in the county deed records along with many others. No mention is made of the "business or occupation" that Mary would learn from her master. Furthermore, the ability to "cipher as far as the rule of three" is left out, as were her "freedom dues," the new suit of clothing that would help her start out in life. In the haste of recording the indenture, the phrase "and so forth" was substituted for a catalog of long-established prohibitions for the four-year-old apprentice to observe, such as playing at dice or haunting taverns.[8]

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[5] Among the apprentices who surface in the records pertaining to Governor Gayosos's tenure (1787-1798) are what appear to be purely artisanal cases, such as Jeremiah Miller, who bound himself to a carpenter and millwright at nineteen, and Michael Hilengher, who became an apprentice tanner at the unusually advanced age of twenty-one. May Wilson McBee, *The Natchez Court Records, 1767-1805: Abstracts of Early Records* Vol. 2 (Greenville, MS, 1954).

[6] Chapter 36, reprinted in P.L. Rainwater, "Sargent's Code," *The American Journal of Legal History* 11 (July 1967), 312-13.

[7] Deed Record Book B, ACCC, 266-67.

[8] "During all which time or term the said apprentice shall well and faithfully serve his said masters: keep their secrets and every where at all times readily obey their lawfull commands: he shall do no damage to his said masters nor willfully suffer any to be done by others: & if any to his knowledge be intended he shall give his master or masters reasonable notice thereof, he shall not waste the goods of his said masters nor lend them unlawfully to any: he shall not play at cards dice nor any other unlawful game: he shall not contract matrimony during the said time: he shall not haunt or frequent Taverns, tippling houses or places of Gaming: he shall not absent himself from the service of his said masters but in all things and at all times he shall carry & behave himself as a good & faithfull apprentice ought during the whole time or term

Bound by their father to learn a specified trade, John and Prestwood Smith were engaging in what many historians call "craft" or "artisanal" or "voluntary" apprenticeship as opposed to the "pauper" or "parish" or "forced" variety in which Mary Eveson is classified.[9] Scholars have long held that the chief purpose of the former type was to facilitate the transmission of manual skills, whereas the latter served as a means of subsistence for minors who had no other recourse. Mary was a poor orphan—that no particular "art or mystery" is specified in her indenture suggests that basic care was indeed the main reason behind her apprenticeship. If indentures comprised the only evidence pertaining to Prestwood and John, it would seem that they were bound out primarily to learn silversmithing, just as Benjamin Franklin, America's most famous apprentice, had been bound out to learn printing.[10] However, other contemporary documents suggest that the Smiths' apprenticeships may have had little, if anything, to do with artisanal training.

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aforesaid." From the 1808 indenture of Luther Bradley, submitted as evidence in a court case filed upon his running away. *James McConnell and Samuel Patterson v. Gideon Hopkins, Nathan H. Luce, and Luther Bradley*, 1811, box 45, file 57, HNF.

[9] Marcus W. Jernegan provides a thorough overview of pauper apprenticeship in *Laboring and Dependent Classes in Colonial America, 1607-1783* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931). There are several monographs that explore both varieties of apprenticeship from English origins to colonial adaptations. See Seybolt, *Apprenticeship and Apprenticeship Education in Colonial New England and New York* and Quimby, *Apprenticeship in Colonial Philadelphia*. John E. Murray and Ruth Wallis Herndon discuss the steady continuation of binding out poor minors in Boston, Rhode Island, and Charleston in "Markets for Children in Early America: A Political Economy of Pauper Apprenticeship," 62 *The Journal of Economic History* (June 2002): 357-61, whereas Murray charts its persistence through 1850 in a separate article, "Fates of Orphans: Poor Children in Antebellum Charleston," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 33 (Spring, 2003): 528-30, 543. Karin L. Zipf notes that apprenticeship remained on the books for poor minors in North Carolina until the state Child Welfare Reform Act was passed in 1919; *Labor of Innocents: Forced Apprenticeship in North Carolina, 1715-1919* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005).

[10] The works discussing his early years as an apprentice printer are too numerous to mention. For the best account of his experience in that institution, see Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Modern Library, 1981).

On July 9, 1794—the day after the boys' indentures were signed, and the day they were approved by the local alcalde—James Smith and his wife Sarah affixed their names to articles of separation.[11] In various petitions and testimonies submitted over two years, the sordid story of this unfortunate couple emerges, including the accusation that Mrs. Smith had "prostituted herself" to a neighbor.[12] Between the lines is the implication that the youngest of four children—an infant named James—was not James Smith's own. Because Mr. Smith traveled frequently, he left the boy with his mother along with their daughter Nancy, though he vowed to remove the girl if displeased with her upbringing. Prestwood and John, on the other hand, would live with his brother William, whom the governor refers to not as a silversmith but as a "Planter."[13] The census of 1820 lists Prestwood Smith as a planter near Natchez with a household of eleven persons, including male and female slaves, all engaged in agriculture.[14] If he had learned silversmithing from his uncle-master, Prestwood did not demonstrably make a living by it.

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[11] The decree by Governor Manuel Gayoso de Lemos, dated July 24, 1794, refers to an act of separation signed by the two parties on "the ninth Instant" as well as a decree issued by him on June 27. The governor issued a second document on July 24, 1794 detailing additional property arrangements. Provincial and Territorial Documents, 1759-1813, NTC.

[12] The documents pertaining to this case appear in McBee, *The Natchez Court Records, 1767-1805*, 194-96. Sarah Phips grew up as an orphan in Natchez, living several years with a local woman and then a brother. Neither caretaker had taken much trouble with her education, for she always signed documents with a mark. Though destitute and indebted, James Smith married her some time in the 1780s, but by 1792 he had "banished" her with the two youngest of their four children. Many months passed and at last Smith petitioned Governor Gayoso for a formal separation. Though Sarah Smith professed unwillingness to formally part with her husband, he persisted, pointing to her coarse manners, snappish temper, and above all, the belief that she had "prostituted herself" to a neighbor during one of his absences.

[13] Decree by Governor Don Manuel Gayoso de Lemos, dated July 24, 1794, Provincial and Territorial Documents, 1759-1813, NTC.

[14] While many men engaged in commerce also had plantations, I have yet to encounter an advertisement in the Natchez newspapers from 1800 (the date they commence) onward mentioning Prestwood Smith engaging in any kind of trade. And in the 1820 census, some of the questions pertained more specifically to work conducted by household members; none in his household is listed as engaging in "manufacturing." Several men of the name "John Smith" appear in the Mississippi census for 1820, so it is difficult to determine what became of Prestwood's younger brother.

Studying apprenticeship along separate lines—artisanal versus pauper—allows a convenient analytical organization. Prestwood and John Smith can be considered through one lens and Mary Eveson through the other. But this historiographical division obscures an essential function of binding out children, whether they were poor or relatively well-to-do: apprenticeship as a means of household formation.[15] In the boys' case, the breakdown of family order led the patriarch, James Smith, to create a new household whereby his brother would serve *in loco parentis* to his nephews. In Mary's case, overseers of the poor and county court justices acted as a collective patriarch over her welfare. The familial bonds forged for these minors were deemed advantageous to their present situation and future prospects. They were also fundamental to the children's overall education, as learning did not occur simply at the workbench or schoolroom but from sunup to sundown. To be sure, the houses of masters and mistresses as well as the characters of their guardians could prove more influential in shaping apprentices than lessons in craft or the rudiments.

With respect the statutory apprenticeship system, the Female Charitable Society at first supplemented existing measures of juvenile relief. Instruction was inaccessible to many children, so members pooled resources to pay for tuition at a local school and then launched their own institution. The evangelical impulses that led the ladies to organized

[15] Though Spanish law allowed adoption, it was primarily pursued for legitimation of heirs and to secure property transfer. Moreover, it does not seem to have been practiced in the Natchez District, where Anglo-American jurisprudence tended to dominate. On Spanish adoption laws and practices, see Joseph McKnight, "Legitimation and Adoption on the Anglo-Hispanic Frontier of the United States," *The Legal History Review* 53 (1985) and "The Shifting Focus of Adoption" in John W. Cairns and Olivia F. Robinson, eds, *Critical Studies in Ancient Law, Comparative Law, and Legal History* (Portland: Hart Publishing, 2001). For recommending and procuring these articles, I am grateful to Mike Widener, former archivist in the special collections at the Tarleton Law Library, The University of Texas at Austin.

benevolence also prompted them to include religion and morality as major areas of study, areas not at all mentioned in the apprenticeship statute.[16] Another important focus of raising the minimum standard of care was the condition of poor children's clothes. Indeed, benevolent women devoted a tremendous amount of time and money to improving the overall appearance of their objects of charity.

But over time, efforts to supplement statutory relief gave way to a campaign to reform it altogether. The Society disputed, for example, the efficacy of laws that excluded children from support because of where they happened to reside rather than perceived need. In clashing with county officials over settlement restrictions and the execution of their prescribed duties, benevolent women cast overseers of the poor, orphan's court justices, and other community fathers as "deadbeat dads," who barely carried out their responsibilities to indigent children. And the provisions that *were* given were no longer adequate. While they never stated so outright, benevolent women seem to have challenged the universal application of an institution that bore many uncomfortable similarities with the dominant form of bound labor in Mississippi. As many of the Society members were of slaveholding families, that form was all too familiar. The designation of guardians as "masters" and "mistresses," their almost absolute control, the expectation of unpaid labor and deference in exchange for paternalistic care conspired to

[16] While a catalog of "shalls" and "shall nots" typically appeared in indentures—no destroying property, no stealing, no drinking, no gambling, no running away—these proscriptions seemed designed more to prevent disruption of the workshop than to develop the moral integrity of the apprentice. Seybolt, *Apprenticeship and Apprenticeship Education*, 13. Mississippi law did not require indentures to contain the above stipulations, though they had long been customary. See, for example, the indenture of Luther Bradley, fn 348. Morality may have been obliquely addressed in apprenticeship indentures, nothing was said about religious instruction perhaps because church attendance was mandatory when the institution became more or less codified in England. A similar mandate existed in early New England communities as well. Social pressures, the need for conspicuous piety in order to gain credit and respectability, may have also made religion—or at least the appearance of it—a matter deemed superfluous for contractual specification.

make apprenticeship appear almost like slavery. Instead, benevolent women sought to fashion a system that seemed less a labor arrangement and more a familial relationship, a relationship that was primarily maternal in form.

Household formation became an issue of great concern to the Female Charitable Society, which began to exercise many of the functions that were once the sole province of county officials. Positioning themselves as civic mothers, benevolent women gradually exerted greater control over white prepubescent minors by sheltering them with hired matrons and placing them with families at later ages than had been exercised by the overseers of the poor. Though rejecting many aspects of statutory relief, the ladies incorporated the mechanics of "binding out" children, provided that guardians acted more like parents than employers and corresponded with their notions of proper upbringing. A few years after the Society's founding, members sought even more control over the welfare of charity children by creating a household of their own. County relief changed as well, turning from a system that encompassed minors regardless of sex, age, or race to one that increasingly took cues from the Society and assisted the children that benevolent women did not.

Improving the Appearance of Relief

A customary feature of apprenticeship was the promise of "freedom dues" upon the expiration of indentures, designed to help the young man or woman secure

employment and begin a life of his or her own.[17] Sometimes dues came in the form of tools; in other instances cash was given. Mississippi law mandated only clothes as a parting gift, specifically "one complete new suit of cloathing, and two shirts; if female, one complete new suit of cloaths and two shifts."[18] Throughout the term of indenture, masters and mistresses were required to supply apprentices "a sufficiency of good and wholesome provisions" including "necessary cloathing."[19] Patrick Connely, for example, assured Mary Eveson "appearal both woollen and Linen suitable for such an apprentice," indicating that he would provide both undergarments and outerwear.[20] They did not have to be new, only fitting—by prevailing standards—for a child in her station. "Suitable for an apprentice," or some variation thereof, is a common refrain in indentures, one that echoed a long-held sentiment that status should determine appearance rather than the other way around.[21]

Connely's accounts do not survive, but county records pertaining to paid caretakers show that it was both cheap and simple to outfit a poor orphan. William Henry King received $4 as reimbursement for clothing Cynthia Williams over a period of six months in 1809, and the amount may have been comparable to what her master or mistress spent when she was bound out as an apprentice by the overseers of the poor five

[17] Mississippi territorial statute set the expiration of indentures at age twenty-one for males and eighteen for females, though the age would subsequently be lowered to eighteen and sixteen respectively.
[18] Rainwater, "Sargent's Code," *The American Journal of Legal History* 11 (July 1967): 312-13. See appendix A for full text of statute.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Indenture dated August 13, 1801; Deed Record Book B, ACCC, 266-67.
[21] For example, John McLenon was pledged "appearel suitable for an apprentice" in his indenture dated October 10, 1809. Deed Record Book F, ACCC, 247.

years later.[22] By contrast, Caroline Burling, eldest daughter of a Female Charitable Society directress, received at least $12 worth of clothes per month from her mother at about the same time.[23] In other words, Cynthia's appearance averaged annually to $8, whereas Caroline's cost $144—eighteen times more than what was spent on the orphan supported by county relief.[24]

Mrs. Burling had to itemize and submit all her expenditures to the executor of her late husband's estate, and the list of Caroline's clothing purchases shows that dressing was a complicated business for a genteel young lady. Five dollars for muslin, another five for a ruff—silk, satin, lace, stockings, gloves, bonnets, jewelry—the account teems with every kind of article and accoutrement a Natchez girl of birth and fortune was expected to wear.[25] Not only did Caroline Burling have clothes to suit the changing seasons, she had apparel for different times of day as well as indoor and outdoor activities. Sunday also required special garb as did mourning. The black silk, hose, and gloves purchased for the outfit probably worn upon her father's death totaled $11.75, almost half again as much as the county paid to clothe Cynthia Williams for the entire

[22] Adams County Vouchers, Z/2227.000: Natchez Historical Society Collection, MDAH. Orphan's Court Minutebook I (April 1803 to January 1815), ACCC, 337-38.
[23] In one of the many accounts submitted to the executors of Walter Burling's estate, the amount $1128 appears next the line "For estimated value of the cost of her clothing in the same amount of time at $12 per month." The previous entry cites the period from "July 1810 to May 1818." Account for Miss Caroline Burling, Burling Family Papers, 1810-1827, NTC. Eliza Burling was elected "Third Directress" at the first annual meeting. March 3, 1817, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[24] Among the few studies relevant to dress in the early republic, are Linda Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal: The Language of Clothing in Colonial and Federal America: The Colonial Williamsburg Collection* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) and Elisabeth McClellan, *History of American Costume, 1607-1870* (New York, Tudor Publishing Company, 1942), which includes a section on clothes in Spanish and French colonial settlements.
[25] Account for Miss Caroline Burling, Burling Family Papers, 1810-1827, NTC.

year.[26] Mrs. Burling's detailed account gives a sense of how her daughter appeared, but a portrait of another Female Charitable Society founder gives a more concrete impression.

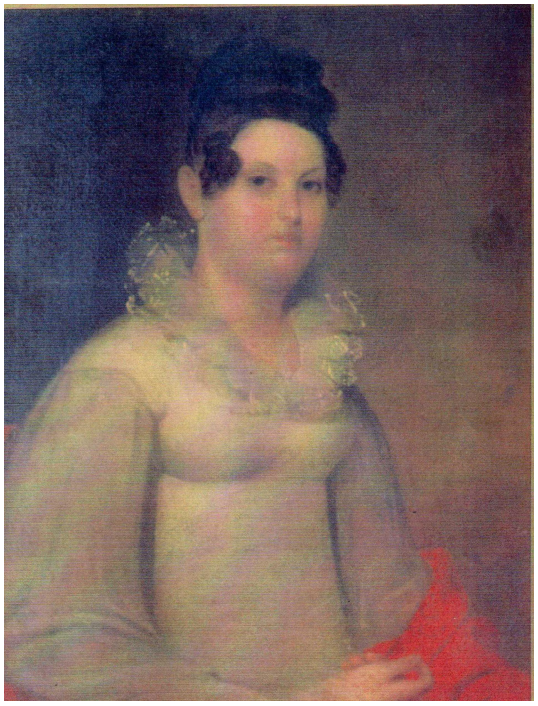

Figure 2

It was at the home of Maria Vidal Davis that the Society's first meeting was held, though this painting was completed before she married the wealthy planter in a wedding that included a ride across the Mississippi in a ferry draped in silk.[27] The elegant empire gown was fitting attire for Maria Clarissa Vidal, who was the daughter of a prominent Spanish official and landowner.[28]

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[26] For more on this peculiarly upper class form of apparel, see Lou Taylor, *Mourning Dress: A Costume and Social History* (Boston: G. Allen and Unwin, 1983).

[27] William Edward West, *Maria Clarissa Vidal*, n.d. Private collection. I am grateful to Kathie Blankenstein for bringing this image of her ancestor to my attention. For more on the artist, see Estill Curtis Pennington, "The Aesthetics of Everyday Life in Old Natchez," in Neil Polk, ed., *Natchez before 1830* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1989), 118.

[28] Don Jose Vidal owned considerable property on the western bank of the Mississippi River around what is now Vidalia, Louisiana.

Such a gown would not have been deemed "suitable" for an apprentice like Mary Eveson, especially as the girl seems to have been taken on as a house servant for Patrick Connely rather than an artisan-in-training.[29] For Mary to clean house in a fashionable dress and elaborate coiffure like Maria Vidal's would have been more trouble for the master than it was worth, not to mention an absurd spectacle. Mary was more likely clothed in second-hand garments or clothes made of inexpensive fabric. Anne Favel Smith dressed cheaply as a poor orphan in Spanish provincial Natchez, a fact that became material evidence in a lawsuit launched by her husband against her former caretaker. In his petition to Governor Gayoso, Lucius Smith claimed that his wife was six years old when she entered the care of Roswell Mygatt and that "she was very soon able to do little services...bringing up a small Family of young children, in Spinning, washing and every other work belonging to a Familly, by which she much more than overpaid all cost and trouble she could have occasioned him." Even so, Mygatt had sold off a "beef" she had inherited to compensate for the "trouble" in raising her. Several witnesses attested that the expense could not have been great owing to her usefulness and industry about the caretaker's house. And as one neighbor noted, "her cloathing while she lived with Mygatt consisted of plain home spun."[30] This coarse material had been a symbol of patriotism during the Revolution, an outward declaration of independence from European

[29] As mentioned earlier, the indenture for Mary Eveson does not specify a trade, a common occurrence in the indentures of apprentices bound out by the county. Her contract states only that she would "serve the said Patrick Connely as an apprentice until she shall arrive to the age of eighteen years (provided she shall so long live)." Indenture dated August 13, 1801; Deed Record Book B, ACCC, 266-67.
[30] Documents pertaining to this suit date from late 1796 and early 1797, Provincial and Territorial Documents, 1759-1813, NTC.

manufactures. By the end of the eighteenth-century, however, homespun was becoming the fabric of the poor and of the enslaved.[31]

Clothing of whatever description was not something the Female Charitable Society initially targeted upon its founding in March 1816. The constitution stipulated that children could receive "support" from surplus funds and then only as the managers saw fit.[32] When the charity children began attending Robert White's school, however, clothes quickly became an urgent concern. At the May meeting, the officers resolved "that a suit of common clothes be purchased for such children as the Society may see are in need," though there is no mention of which of the seven boys and six girls required outfits or how they were procured.[33] In October, shortly before the children entered the Lancastrian Academy, the Society made another round of provisioning. This time, the officers ordered "warm clothes for each child," not simply those who seemed to lack them.[34] Evidently, all of them did. And in early December, they ordered "a new suit of Clothes for the express purpose of having the Children go regularly to the Presbyterian Church every Sunday neatly clad in a suitable dress all of one colour."[35] As discussed earlier, the color may have been blue, which had long been emblematic of charity. It

[31] On the political implications of homespun and its decline as a patriotic symbol, see Michael Zakim, "Sartorial Ideologies: From Homespun to Ready-Made," *American Historical Review* 106 (December 2001): 1553-1586. See also Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Knopf, 2001). Shane White and Graham White note that slave dress began to appear distinctive at the turn of the nineteenth century, when masters increasingly turned clothing production over to them. Coarse, homespun fabric was the norm for everyday wear, though on Sundays they donned clothes that were more refined and ornate, a tendency that will be discussed later. "Slave Clothing and African-American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Past and Present* (August 1995): 166, 173-74.
[32] Article five of the Female Charitable Society constitution. March 12, 1816, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[33] Ibid., May 6, 1816.
[34] Ibid., October 2, 1816.
[35] Ibid., December 2, 1816.

was not enough to send the children to church in the warm outfits they had received two months earlier. Apparently, they were not "suitable" for public worship, and so the managers helped prepare new ones designed expressly for church and intended to make the "orphans" favorably conspicuous. The managers went to the Academy and "furnished to each boy and girl a Sunday dress, also a hat and Bonnet."[36]

Abandoning its initial strictures, the Female Charitable Society became concerned with giving poor children not only what was necessary but what was seemly. Sunday was an adjective as well as a noun, and "Sunday dress" referred to fine clothes untainted by workaday wear, perhaps the finest clothes one possessed. Although a special outfit reserved for the Sabbath may have been implied by the "good and wholesome" requirement in the apprenticeship statute, such a provision would have been costly. The nine children under the Society's protection ranged from ages six to ten, a period of tremendous physical growth and change. Keeping them comfortable in garments tailored to the seasons and days of the week may have seemed a Sisyphean task to the ladies, yet every year they increased the amount of time and money spent on improving the children's appearance.

Society members may not have seen this attention to clothing as a deviation from their original goal of educating poor children. To evangelicals, education went beyond the "three R's" and religious doctrine. Indeed, the authors of evangelical tracts expended considerable ink "instructing" the reader *what to believe* as well as *how to behave*, in particular, *how to appear*. Upon meeting the eponymous character of *The Shepherd of*

[36] Ibid., December 7, 1816.

Salisbury Plain, for instance, Mr. Johnson muses at length over his clothes, which were patched but clean and neat.[37] And on a subsequent visit, he finds the shepherd looking "respectable in his Sunday coat."[38] More says very little about what Mr. Johnson wears, perhaps assuming that his status as a gentleman conveyed a clear enough picture. With poorer characters, however, she is meticulous, as if to show readers of similar class how they ought to comport themselves. Even the children are used as pedagogical vehicles. In one scene, the shepherd's daughter brings him tufts of wool gathered from the bushes, a "piece of frugal industry" that More verifies as "a real fact" in a footnote. When asked about the wool by Mr. Johnson, the shepherd replies, "My wife and I cannot endure to see our children (poor as they are) without shoes and stockings, not only on account of the pinching cold which cramps their poor little limbs, but because it degrades and debases them."[39]

While there are no references to purchase of shoes and stockings in the minutebook, the Female Charitable Society surely made a point of furnishing these items. After all, the officers had expressed concern that the charity children "be comfortable" as well as "neatly clad."[40] Barefooted boys and girls could hardly be neat or warm in the winter, when most of the clothes were given out. To be sure, the provision of "Sunday dress" indicates the desire of benevolent women to make "respectable" the boys and girls in their care. And with enslaved children in bare feet about Natchez and the surrounding plantations, the ladies may have deliberately avoided having their white charges appear

[37] Hannah More, *The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain*, *Part I* (London: J. Marshall and R. White, 1795), 4.
[38] Hannah More, *The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain*, *Part II* (London: J. Marshall and R. White, 1795), 5.
[39] Hannah More, *The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain*, *Part I* (London: J. Marshall and R. White, 1795), 14.
[40] October 2 and December 2, 1816, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.

similar. Though some masters and mistresses gave shoes to slaves, many if not most went without according to former slaves' own recollections.[41]

If the lack of certain articles of clothing degraded and debased, an excess could prove equally injurious, a moral exemplified in the tract *The Dairyman's Daughter*. As servant to a family inclined to extravagance, the heroine could not resist adopting their ways, which she later regrets. "My dress, like that of too many gay, vain, and silly girls, was much above my station, and very different from that which becomes a humble sinner, who has a modest sense of propriety and decency," she laments. "The state of my mind was visible enough from the foolish finery of my apparel."[42] In other words, clothes were not merely necessities: they shaped one's character, defined one's position, and could lead to one's ruin if too strong a fondness for finery were cultivated. For Society members to dress charity children as they would their own sons and daughters would cultivate dangerous habits of consumption. Simple, respectable clothes taught poor boys and girls all the right lessons.

In reports made to the orphan's court, the overseers of the poor for Adams County never mention clothing. As with instruction, visiting every apprentice to ensure that he or she was receiving a "sufficiency of good and wholesome provisions" was too cumbersome. The Female Charitable Society held an advantage on this front. Because the charity children attended the same school—and many lived with the hired matron—inspecting them on a regular basis was entirely feasible. Furthermore, the Society could

[41] John Solomon Otto and Augustus Marion Burns III, "Black Folks and Poor Buckras: Archeological Evidence of Slave and Overseer Living Conditions on an Antebellum Plantation," *Journal of Black Studies* 14 (December 1983): 193.
[42] Legh Richmond, *The Dairyman's Daughter* (Andover: Flagg and Gould, 1815), 112.

attend to the appearance of young indigent minors more easily and efficiently than could male officials, for ladies had been brought up to sew.[43] "The afternoon was mostly spent in cutting out clothes for the children," recorded the secretary in one meeting's minutes, and there are several other references to the officers fashioning outfits.[44] Unlike male officials, Society members could economically fashion a basic necessity and shape the appearance of their wards according to their own notions, which were very particular. Every month a manager examined the children's educational progress, and over time an "Inspector of the clothing" was designated to check their appearance as well.[45]

Indeed, the managers seem to have spent more time on clothes than instruction, yet the process of making garments was in itself an educative device. As early as May 1819, they employed one of the girls as an assistant; half her day was spent at school and the other half "making the children's clothes."[46] By helping out, she was also receiving very useful vocational training. For her and other charity girls, sewing was no mere ornamental accomplishment—it would likely be the way she earned her living as an adult. Moreover, the officers had little choice but to enlist the help of female charity

[43] Polite mothers took care to see that their daughters were instructed in embroidery as well as plain needlework. Girls plied the needle for hours on end to create elaborate pieces that would adorn the home and display their correct education. They were also taught how to mend and how to embellish their clothes to reflect the latest fashions, leaving the bulk of the dressmaking labor to a seamstress or skillful servant. Amy Boyce Osaki, "A 'Truly Feminine Employment': Sewing and the Early Nineteenth-Century Woman," *Winterthur Portfolio* 23 (Winter 1988): 225-241. See also Betty Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery: American Samplers and Pictorial Needlework, 1650-1850* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1993) and Betty Ring, *Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee: Needlework in the Education of Rhode Island Women, 1730-1830* (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Society, 1983). In Natchez, mistresses of slaves often assumed the responsibility of preparing their humble garments, a task that was never-ending in large households and plantations.
[44] September 20, 1817, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[45] Eliza Tichenor was appointed to inspect the children's clothing at the meeting on May 6, 1819 and again on April 3, 1820, at which time another officer was commissioned with assisting her; Ibid..
[46] Ibid., May 6, 1819.

children, as there never seemed to be sufficient clothing.[47] Because the ladies were determined to provide each growing boy and girl a small wardrobe of apparel, there was always someone who needed something to wear.[48]

"With a view to economise the scanty funds of the society, and the better and more certainly to ensure the comforts of the Orphans—the members of this society engage to furnish, without any charge on the Treasury, such articles of clothing, as can readily be spared from their families, and meet and make up additional clothing when it may be thought necessary."[49] When the Female Charitable Society made this resolution, did any of the velvet suits or silk dresses worn by the members' sons and daughters come down to the charity children?[50] If so, such costly garments had probably been repaired and made over too many times for children of means to wear and still appear respectable. But neither would the ladies permit the orphans run to around in rags. As the Female Charitable Society demonstrated in their relentless campaign to clothe the children, it was not enough to provide smart attire only when poor minors were grown. Neat second-hand clothes and new, albeit plain, garments would make the boys and girls comfortable while instilling in their minds good habits that would persist into adulthood.

The Scourge of Settlement

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[47] "The Orphans are much in want of clothing," or a similar phrase frequently appears in the minutes. Ibid., May 1, 1820.
[48] Ibid., On June 4, 1821, for example, the officers "ordered that four suits of clothing be made for two Orphans."
[49] Ibid., April 3, 1820.
[50] Though focusing on an early period, Karin Calvert shows through portraits the kinds of outfits worn by children of affluent parents. "Children in American Family Portraiture, 1670 to 1810," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 39 (January 1982): 87-113. See also Karin Calvert, *Children in the House: The Material Culture of Early Childhood, 1600-1900* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1994).

Mary Eveson and Caroline Burling may have had little in common with respect to their appearance or situation, but as orphaned minors in Adams County, they were processed by the same orphan's court.[51] Propertied orphans under fourteen years of age were appointed guardians, who had to post a bond as a measure of security for the estate; children above the "age of discretion" could choose guardians of their own. Destitute and friendless orphans were handled similarly, whether infants or young adults. Under the law, indigent minors were the responsibility of the overseers of the poor, who brought them to the attention of the justices whenever the court convened, usually once every three to four months. However, according to the statute only those minors "chargeable to the county, or likely to become so" were eligible for relief.[52] That is to say, only poor children residing within the boundaries of Adams County would receive assistance. Minors who could not claim "settlement" were someone else's problem.

Settlement restrictions had long been a regular accompaniment to poor relief laws. As these laws arose in England during the sixteenth century, public assistance became confined to certified residents of the parish, namely those who had been born or bound as apprentices there. Anyone "strolling" beyond the parish without the means of self-support was given the whip, the preferred corrective instrument for vagrants and the idle poor.[53] Such provisions were retained in poor laws enacted throughout British America,

[51] See chapter 1 for a thorough discussion of the form and function of the orphan's court.
[52] P.L. Rainwater, "Sargent's Code," *The American Journal of Legal History* 11 (July 1967): 312-13.
[53] References to "strolling beggars" date back to Tudor England as does the notion of "warning out." For more on English settlement laws, see James Stephen Taylor, "The Impact of Pauper Settlement, 1691-1834," *Past and Present* 73 (November 1976): 42-74. For analysis on the American adoption of this practice, see Benjamin Joseph Klebaner, *Public Poor Relief in America, 1790-1860* (New York: Arno Press, 1976) and Ruth Wallis Herndon, *Unwelcome Americans: Living on the Margin in Early New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

despite the prevailing problem of a dearth of people rather than a superabundance. In Mississippi, men or women who had "no apparent means of subsistence" and made themselves a public nuisance could be put jailed or given thirty-nine lashes.[54] Poor young children were not subject to such harsh punishments on grounds that they were incapable of supporting themselves, yet those who lacked county residence could legally be ignored by the overseers of the poor.

The women who founded the Female Charitable Society made no mention of offering instruction only to Adams County residents. With respect to supporting poor children and widows, there was only one restriction, that of "extending the Charity of the Society (except in cases of extreme distress) only to those of reputable Character."[55] Perceived need and worth were the chief criteria employed by benevolent women, who confined aid to the white citizenry. But rather than adhere to the parameters set by article five—giving support only as surplus funds permitted—the officers began to shelter, feed, and clothe a widow and number of children before the charity school had even been established.

Apparently, Mrs. Floyd required assistance, and either the county gave none or an insufficient amount. From early May onward, she assumed the role of hired matron for some charity children in addition to caring for her own son and daughter. Perhaps all of them had been casualties of the orphan's court interval, as the justices had convened on April 1 and would not meet again until July.[56] Or they may have been rejected as objects

[54] From "An ACT to restrain Idle and Disorderly Persons," passed December 5, 1801. Reprinted in Henry Toulmin, *The Statutes of the Mississippi Territory*... (Natchez: Samuel Terrell, 1807), 353.
[55] March 12, 1816, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[56] Dates of sessions appear in Orphan's Court Minutebook II (February 1815 to January 1820), ACCC.

not properly chargeable. The following autumn, however, the managers received two more children while the orphan's court was in session, children who may have been residents of Adams County and, thus, the responsibility of the overseers of the poor.[57] The earliest children helped by the Society were likely known to some of the members, or perhaps Daniel Smith or some other third party had brought them forward. However, once the ladies entered the business of offering full support, it was never suspended. In fact, the Female Charitable Society very soon became seen as a source of relief, as overseers of the poor and justices of the orphan's court had long been regarded. The women were approached not simply by those in distress but also affluent individuals looking to be "relieved" of destitute persons in their vicinity.

Mary Hutchins Green, for instance, was the daughter a very substantial landowner who had settled in Natchez during British rule, and her husband was a wealthy planter in his own right. Abner Green himself hailed from a prominent family—it was at his boyhood mansion that Andrew Jackson wed Rachel Robards.[58] Mrs. Green certainly had the means to support Mary and Sarah Gregory, poor sisters aged seven and nine respectively, who were "living on her plantation" in Adams County.[59] Given the recent loss of her husband and the fact that her own children were grown, she may have found childrearing more than she could handle. And she could not very well house white orphans with her slaves in the quarters. Mrs. Green was a founding subscriber of the

[57] I am referring here to Mary and Sarah Gregory, who will be discussed later.
[58] Mary was the daughter of Col. Anthony Hutchins, who had been appointed a civil official when Natchez was part of the British province of West Florida. Abner Green was the son of Thomas Green, owner of Springfield plantation, where Jackson infamously wed a woman who was not yet legally divorced. See Clayton D. James, *Antebellum Natchez* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968).
[59] September 2, 1816, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.

Female Charitable Society, to whom she applied for help in September 1816.[60] The Society granted it the following month, "thinking proper to take the two Children when Mrs. Green sends them to town." Mary and Sarah were then placed with Mrs. Floyd, who was already caring for six other children and herself on an allowance of $17 per month.[61] Early in January 1817, the overseers of the poor apprenticed a boy named James Gregory to a local farmer, and it is possible he was the girls' brother.[62] If so, why were Mary and Sarah not apprenticed? And why did Mrs. Green not refer them to the proper authorities?

Some citizens could not be bothered to do so. In June 1817, the Female Charitable Society was requested to receive a girl named Rachel Dison, and the managers "resolved, that, the child proposed by Mrs. Saml. Dunbar be received by the Society as an object of real charity as Mr. D— refused to take any responsibility on himself to intercede with the *overseers of the poor* in behalf of s'd child as he states it did not belong to the county in which he resides."[63] Though not as great a planter as Abner Green, Samuel Dunbar was quite comfortable judging by the number of slaves in his possession, and he could have easily assisted Rachel.[64] He might have, had she been settled in Jefferson County, where his plantation was located, immediately to the north of

[60] Ibid., n.d. Mary Green appears in the list of original subscribers before the first meeting, having contributed $20.
[61] Ibid., October 2, 1816.
[62] "Ordered that the overseer of the poor in the proper District bind out James Gregory an orphan Boy under fourteen years of age to Hardy Sojourner until he arrives a the age of twenty one years, to Learn the trade of a Planter." January term, 1817, Orphan's Court Minutebook II (February 1815 to January 1820), ACCC, 84.
[63] June 7, 1817, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[64] The 1810 census shows Dunbar with twelve slaves. By 1820 that number had decreased to seven, yet represented about $3500 of property, given that slaves averaged $500 at sale. Norman E. Gillis, *Early Inhabitants of the Natchez District* (Baton Rouge: Irene S. and Norman E. Gillis, 1963), 41.

Natchez. Yet he would not take the trouble to inform the appropriate officials of her need. Instead, Rachel was "boarded, clothed and educated" entirely by the Society.[65] Later minutebook entries reveal that the girl's mother was alive, and she may have also had a brother who was an apprentice.[66] She must have been settled somewhere, but perhaps could not prove her residence. In any case, Mr. Dunbar did not contact the Jefferson County overseers of the poor because, according to him, she did not meet an important criterion for obtaining statutory relief there. Or perhaps it was simply easier to pass the problem to his wife, who was connected with a new society formed to assist the children of the poor.

Though flexible in these circumstances, the officers of the Female Charitable Society were firm about maintaining certain philanthropic boundaries, as when "a petition from an indigent and distressed female was presented but rejected as inconsistent with the object of the Society, and improper to draw money from its treasury for such an appropriation." Whatever reason compelled the officers to deny the woman's claim, members were free to do as they wished outside associational confines, so indicates the very next line in the minutebook entry: "The ladies however resolved as individuals to assist her."[67] Organizations depended upon order for efficiency and longevity. Members could not pursue benevolence willy-nilly, lest they lose public credibility. Critics of

[65] Rachel Dison was received into the Society on July 12, 1817, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[66] "One of the children patronized by the Society has been taken home by her mother, from apprehension of sickness—The child was Rachel Dison." Ibid., August 30, 1817. Though no one by the name of Dison appears in either the Orphan's Court Minutebooks or Deed Record Books for Adam's County, a notice advertising a reward for runaway apprentice Thomas Dison appears in the *Mississippi State Gazette*, September 12, 1818.
[67] September 20, 1817, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.

female societies were fond of casting women as incapable of sticking to any one thing for very long and predicting that, as a result, collective endeavors were doomed to failure from the outset.[68] Conscious of criticisms and operational realities, Society members made a clear distinction between their identity as an association and as individuals, and in that latter capacity the sympathetic, benevolent impulses that led them to collective action in the first place prompted them to assist the poor woman.[69] As long as the recipient fell within acceptable parameters of *need* and *character*, to have refused aid might also have caused the ladies to injure their own reputations as naturally inclined toward benevolence, an inclination which bolstered their associational authority.[70]

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[68] As the officers of the Female Orphan Asylum Society acknowledged in their second annual report: "The want of funds, joined to that natural versatility so commonly associated with the female character, it was predicted, would, ere this period should elapse, completely exhaust the feelings that gave birth to the institution of the Female Orphan Society. Other feelings of the same date may have passed away; but these, we trust, remain in all their force: for can an impulse that flows from so pure a source as that of benevolence, and has so evidently received its sanction from the fostering care of an Almighty hand, be weakened by the mere flight of time?" January 16, 1819, Minutebook I (January 1817 to January 1823), Poydras Home Collection, HTML.

[69] Anne M. Boylan constructs biographical portraits of several women engaged in the arduous task of founding charitable societies during the early republic, such as Isabella Marshall Graham and Elizabeth Bayley Seton. She argues that these and other women were compelled to activism by a number of factors personal and external, but were united in their energy and commitment to a collective benevolent cause. *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), chap. 3.

[70] Perhaps more useful for gaining insight into ideal rather than natural depictions of prominent women, obituaries marked one of the few instances (wedding notices being another) where the names of local ladies appeared in newspapers, and they typically extolled the deceased for her piety, her affection, and, in particular, her benevolence. Of those surveyed in Mississippi newspapers of the early nineteenth century, the obituary of Mary Holliday represents a typical example and is worth quoting in its entirety: "DIED, at Richlands, near Pinckneyville, on the 23d inst. Mrs. MARY B. wife of John Holliday, Esq. In this event we have to lament the loss of a lady who was highly reputed for her distinguished goodness, and whose character was a bright assemblage of the Christian virtues. Such was the benevolence of her disposition, and such the amiable qualities of her heart, that she never failed to gain the esteem and affection of all who knew her. Her countenance, which was the image of benignity, was expressive of the excellent sentiments and principles which actuated her conduct. The feature which shone most conspicuous in her character, was vital practical piety. Her religion was a constant principle of action; it discovered itself in her social intercourse, and shed abroad in her heart, love to God, and love to her fellow creatures. In imitation of her divine master, it may be said, it was her delight to be doing good. She was ever attentive to the wants of her neighbor, and ever ready to relieve them. She took a lively interest in the welfare and happiness of those around her; and in her death the neighborhood have lost an active friend and benefactor. To her numerous

Besides demonstrating the methods of Female Charitable Society members, the cases of the girls and the unnamed woman raise interesting questions about the male officials who took an oath pledging to carry out the following statutory duties:

> to make report to any justice of the peace, in and for the county, of all vagrant persons, likely to become chargeable to the township, for which he is appointed overseer, and also to take notice of all the poor and distressed families, and persons residing in his proper township; and enquire into the means by which they are supported, and maintained. And whenever he shall discover any person or family, realy suffering through poverty, sickness, accident, or any misfortune, or inability, which may render him, her or them, a wretched and proper object of public charity; it shall be his duty, and he is hereby strictly enjoined, to give immediate information thereof, to a justice of the peace, acting in and for the same county, that legal means may be taken by such justice, to afford the person or persons so suffering, proper and seasonable relief.[71]

Overseers and justices were essentially patriarchs of the poor, tending to their welfare as long they were legitimate members of the county "family." And though assistance was made possible through taxation, it was framed as a matter of "public charity." Charity, however, was not inexhaustible, and settlement restrictions ensured that taxpayers were not consumed by their own kindness. Had the county patriarchs investigated the claims of Mary and Sarah Gregory or Rachel Dison? What about the "distressed female"—had she applied for and been denied public relief? Had overseers or justices attempted to help any of these females themselves? Or had the proper authorities been bypassed altogether

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friends this event is a loss which cannot soon be repaired. Her kind attentions, disinterested attachment, and purity of principle, gained her the confidence, love and respect of all. She was a truly devout woman; she had the deepest veneration for the sabbath and the sanctuary, and was throughout an exemplary christian. In the death of this excellent person, her children have lost a kind and watchful parent, a husband a tender and affectionate wife, her acquaintances an endeared and respected friend; and society at large, a useful and pious member. Her life affords an instructive lesson to all—and her example is worthy of universal imitation." *Mississippi State Gazette*, September 30, 1818.

[71] From Chapter 14, "A law for dividing the Counties into Townships and constituting constables and overseers of the poor." Rainwater, "Sargent's Code," *The American Journal of Legal History* 11 (April 1967): 198. The stipulation that overseers of the poor must take an oath of office follows this provision.

in favor of a society of benevolent women, who were becoming seen as more likely to readily give assistance?

In the early republic, men may have been regarded as providers, yet increasingly women were regarded as the principal nurturers of the young, a characterization fueled by increasing maternal dominance in the household. Mothers became the primary caregivers to their children as well as the primary caretakers of the home, roles that were cast as a political and evangelical imperative.[72] Legally and socially a woman remained an inferior being. However, an association of females distinguished by high status and fervent religious impulses gained influence in the community comparable to the ascendancy achieved by women in the domestic sphere.[73] In other words, private transformations affected public perceptions, and benevolent women became seen as

[72] On the ascendancy of mothers, see Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press,1980; New York: W.W. Norton, 1986) and Nancy Cott on "Domesticity" in *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), chap. 2. According to Margaret A. Nash evangelicalism propelled the image of women as natural mothers and that motherhood was a primary religious duty among women. *Women's Education in the United States, 1780-1840* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 55-59. In his essay. "The Changing Faces of Fatherhood," John Demos asserts that by the end of the nineteenth century, the "mother was now the primary parent" and that the home had become a thoroughly female sphere. *Past, Present, and Personal: The Family and the Life Course in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 49. In characterizing the nineteenth-century American family, Carl N. Degler posits that the responsibility of childrearing and keeping the home had shifted primarily to women, who were deemed morally superior though legally and socially inferior. *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 8-9; see also chaps. 2-4.

[73] Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace writes that "evangelicalism also involved women in an important dynamic: by assuming control over the symbolic body of an infantilized, working-class 'other,' the evangelical woman defined herself in relation to what she was not; her supreme bodily self-discipline became the identifying mark of her class privilege." *Their Fathers' Daughters: Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth, and Patriarchal Complicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 74.

mothers to poor children and certain indigent females, thus displacing officials like overseers of the poor who had traditionally served as their guardians.[74]

If the members of the Natchez Female Charitable Society felt any triumph in their emerging community significance, they did not record it. To be sure, the minutes express a collective sense of harassment as opposed to jubilation. Establishing a school, clothing the children, and arranging full support for some of them were costly in both time and funds. While the Society could have scaled back to providing instruction only, a perceived need and an unwillingness to refuse assistance led "surplus" allowances to become principal concerns, but the ladies stood to fail in all their benevolent designs unless they received some relief themselves.

Fortunately, some relief arrived at the first annual meeting in 1817. In addition to the charity sermon proceeds and the subscriptions from new and old members, a total of $590 was given to the Society by a number of gentlemen. Daniel Smith donated $25 as did Benjamin Davis, and these and several other gentlemen also pledged to be annual subscribers.[75] One of the largest contributions—$100 as a single rather than yearly donation—came from John Minor, who was also one of the Adams County overseers of

[74] Bruce Dorsey argues that benevolent societies "opened a middle ground for young white women reformers between these two gender poles of masculine virtue and feminine spiritual authority." He also takes issue with using "Republican Motherhood" as an all-encompassing paradigm, asserting that philanthropic women in the early republic were driven as much, if not more, by Christian ideals. Though he places female societies' own maternal rhetoric as a post-1815 development, sermons given on their behalf before this time certainly cast benevolent women in motherly terms, as I discuss in chapter 1. *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 14, 28, 31.

[75] The list of subscribers is not clearly organized, but it seems that at least nine women joined the Society after the annual meeting on March 3, 1817. Their names are added at the bottom of the original 1816 list in the minutebook. No amount for the charity sermon is recorded. Mr. Huntington's gift is recorded on April 12, 1817. At the very back of the minutebook is a list of twenty-four gentlemen who pledged donations and annual subscriptions. Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.

the poor.[76] The spring fundraising, however, was not enough to take care of all the Society's financial concerns. Despite the generous gift from Mr. Minor as a private citizen, the women began to press him and his fellow officials to perform the duties they had sworn to carry out.

Shortly after the annual meeting at the Lancastrian Academy, the Society officers drew up a petition for the orphan's court and submitted "an account of the expence of boarding six destitute Children."[77] That was during the April term. Apparently nothing happened with the petition, for when the July term commenced, the officers held a special meeting to once again "earnestly solicit, at the present session of the Orphan's Court, assistance from the Overseers of the poor for this County to defray the expense of board for those poor children who belong to the county, the support of whom, but for this Society would wholly devolve on them."[78] Having just received Rachel Dison, the girl Mr. Samuel Dunbar "refused" to assist, may have made the ladies' financial situation appear all the more urgent. Every month seemed to bring another charity child, and few were leaving the Society's care.[79] The principle of the issue may have also played a role: the desire of benevolent women to ensure that overseers of the poor and orphan's court justices did not shirk their statutory duties.

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[76] John Minor appears in the apprenticeship record for John Scotthorn, a thirteen-year-old orphan who was bound out to a hatter. Entry recorded on January 14, 1817, Deed Record Book I, ACCC, 226-27.
[77] April 2, 1817, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[78] Ibid., July 12, 1817.
[79] On April 2, the Society admitted two children to be instructed, including a boy named Philander Boyce who later received full support. On May 3, two applications were received, and "by a vote of the society it was determined as soon as possible to receive one of the children immediately, and make as soon as possible some arrangement for the other." Another child had been received by the June 7 meeting. Ibid.

Along with submitting petitions to secure rightfully-owed assistance, the Female Charitable Society pursued other, innovative financial avenues. In April, six shares of bank stock were purchased to begin an endowment and thus render funds more stable.[80] And by the end of June, the officers decided to send a circular letter throughout the region along with a copy of the annual report. If the letter and report were not enough to compel readers to "patronage," then maybe the "subscription papers"—a list of all the personages supporting the Society—would inspire them to add their own names.[81] This was the first step taken by benevolent women toward actively expanding their geographical reach. Though the constitution stipulated that "all needy objects from the Country who may apply for relief to this Society will be received," the managers were to limit their searches to Natchez and its immediate surroundings.[82] Increasing the sphere of patronage also increased the sphere of assistance, an ambitious undertaking that helps explain the financial urgency.

Apparently not deterred by financial challenges, the Female Charitable Society continued to enlarge its scope, eventually forming a more comprehensive network and appointing agents in a number of towns, such as Washington, Woodville, and Pinckneyville. Some agents were designated in communities far from Adams County, such as Port Gibson and Greenville, which respectively lay about forty and one hundred and fifty miles north of Natchez. The Society even designated agents outside Mississippi. Ladies were appointed in St. Francisville and Baton Rouge in the state of

[80] Ibid., April 12, 1817.
[81] Ibid., June 28, 1817.
[82] Ibid., March 12, 1816.

Louisiana "to receive donations" on the Society's behalf, though doing so likely made them a point of contact for the reception of objects of charity as well.[83] Whether consciously or not, the Society was forming a system to administer and support benevolent endeavors over a large region, much in the way that territorial statutes had ordered a system for the dispensation of poor relief.

In the midst of extending benevolence beyond city, county, and state borders, the Society did not forget to pursue what the law promised children who were rightfully settled. The officers submitted accounts to the overseers of the poor and the orphan's court during two separate sessions, yet these petitions were ignored. After the two attempts in 1817, no further mention is made in the minutes of soliciting funds from Adams County officials, though requests could have been made informally or simply excluded from the record. One thing is certain: the ladies persisted. Having failed to achieve results through the proper channels, they took their case to the public in the 1819 annual report. It was read at the anniversary meeting, held in the Presbyterian church, and ordered published in the local newspaper:

> It was expected the usual County poor fund could have contributed something in relieving the Society from a part of the charge of boarding all the children—many of whom are properly fit subjects to be supported by the county and not to burthen this Society with other expense than clothing and education.
>
> Deriving nothing from the guardians of the county who, it was hoped would lend a helping hand, in the support of some of those needy objects properly chargable to them—the Society were compelled to devote a large share of their funds towards the subsistence of the Orphans, thereby reducing their means, in the promotion and extension of the blessings of education, of moral and religious instruction.[84]

[83] Ibid., April 3, 1820.
[84] Ibid., April 5, 1819.

In tones reminiscent of a mother endeavoring to claim support from a delinquent father, the Female Charitable Society asserted that the county guardians were not caring for their own. While many American states had laws to compel fathers to pay for their children if paternity could be established, benevolent women had no recourse but public rhetoric and personal sympathy.[85] What is most striking about this excoriation of male officials is that it was immediately followed by exoneration. Indeed, the very next sentence announces that, despite the hardship the ladies had suffered due to errant overseers and justices, they had at last achieved their desired object:

> Tho' hitherto trusting in their own means, they have the satisfaction to state, that some relief will be hereafter derived from the funds of the county—which will greatly soften the money difficulties they encounter.[86]

Whatever funds were allocated to the Society, the officers were subsequently able to pay $10 per child for room and board every month, in contrast to the $17 per month that had been given to Mrs. Floyd for the care of six children.[87] If the county had responded favorably before the annual meeting, why include the disagreeable back story in the annual report? Among those who heard or read the above assertions were undoubtedly some whose opinion mattered with respect to civil offices. By delineating the hardships occasioned by an inattentive county court—and the Society's ability to overcome them—members were shoring up financial support as well as public acceptance for their nascent institution, which directly challenged a system upheld by centuries of law and custom.

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[85] On fathers being compelled to support their illegitimate offspring, see Clare A. Lyons, *Sex Among the Rabble: An Intimate History of Gender and Power in the Age of Revolution, Philadelphia, 1730-1830* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), chap. 2.
[86] April 5, 1819, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[87] October 2, 1816, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.

For the first few years, benevolent women strove to ensure that the county supported minors who were entitled to relief under the law. The minutes of the orphans' court show that the overseers and orphan's court justices were not utterly neglectful. In 1815, the year before the Female Charitable Society formed, a record sixteen minors were bound out as apprentices. The following year, thirteen were bound out, and the year after that eight.[88] Judging by extant records, apprenticeship was never consistently prevalent in Adams County, but the years before the Society's founding were highly active with respect to binging out poor minors. County officials may have seen the new female association as a convenient repository for some of their charges, a way to lighten their burden. But the dual existence of statutory and charitable relief only made the situation more difficult for the women, as they were the ones who had to continually justify their work.

The last time benevolent women seem to have directly challenged male officials was in 1820, the year after the first public rebuke. "In offering a fourth annual report to the generous patrons of the Female Charitable Society, the Managers solicit for themselves a patient hearing of their hopes, fears, and perplexities." The previous year had been especially difficult, with Natchez and its environs thrown into chaos because of a yellow fever epidemic. And the funds received from the county coffer had long been expended. Unfortunately, the minutebook is torn in places and no other copy of this report can be found. Despite the absence of certain words, perhaps phrases, what *is*

[88] Numbers compiled from data in the Orphan's Court Minutebook II (February 1815 to January 1820), ACCC.

legible indicates that the officers were striving for more than a financial disbursement. They were attempting to convince citizens that the Society had formed a better system.

> Many object [page torn] the necessity of such an establishment, when the County supports the poor—but surely reflection admonishes, that something [page torn] the cheerless support allow'd by our laws [page torn] wanting, to unite the *helpless* to society, to guide, and guard, and lead them to the way of usefulness. The object of this Society is to confer the benefit of moral and religious instruction—to arrest profligacy, cherish virtue, strengthen the feeble, as well as to bestow the tender guardianship of a parent on the bereaved orphan.—While we continue then to ask the boon of Charity, let none be weary of our solicitation.[89]

In the opinion of benevolent women, the statutory system of relief had become moribund, and the old standard of care was falling short. Settled minors received basic necessities, primarily under the auspices of apprenticeship, but they languished for lack of religious and moral guidance as well as the lack of paternal nurture. In other words, the Society argued that rather than masters, poor and orphaned children needed parents. While no gender is specified in the above annual report, the call for continued support of the Female Charitable Society seems to argue that women were better equipped to fill that role than county officials. Evidence shows that, struggles aside, the ladies succeeded in making their case.

From Masters to Parents

During the territorial period apprenticeship appears to have been a fairly uniform practice, but in the years following Mississippi statehood, which was granted on December 10, 1817, its form altered. Though no record has been found of county

[89] March 6, 1820, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.

officials or legislators acknowledging as such, the work of the Female Charitable Society must have played a significant role in bringing about a change in the institution, including the language surrounding it. Rather than remain a business arrangement between an employer and young laborer, the transaction began to resemble more of a familial relationship. The Society perpetuated several aspects of the old system, such as the brokerage of children and the use of written instruments to bind two parties. And in placing their young charges with adult guardians, officers experienced some of the same challenges that had been faced by overseers and orphan's court justices. Over time, however, benevolent women effected a transformation of the management of poor and orphaned children in Adams County, one that reflected their values and notions of how young white minors should be raised.

As the managers expanded their charitable operations to render basic support a concern equal with instruction, they seemed resigned to functioning *in loco parentis* for the children. However, as more and more arrived, the officers developed a more coherent plan for how they would be managed. "The Society is desirous that the children be learned to work," resolved the ladies in the July 1817, "that when at a suitable age to be removed from it, they may be able to take care of themselves."[90] If the officers anticipated keeping boys and girls in their protection until they were truly ready to strike out on their own, that notion quickly faded. By the end of the summer a Mrs. Pearse, possibly D. H. Pearse, co-founder of the Natchez Academy and Female Charitable Society secretary, requested to take two of the children "on trial." They were six-year-

[90] July 12, 1817, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.

old Washington White and seven-year-old Mary Gregory, referred to by the nickname of Polly.[91] While Mrs. Pearse's intentions for the children are not indicated, she probably did not have their capacity for labor foremost in mind, otherwise she might have selected nine-year-old Daniel Griffin, or Betsey Willcox, the former apprentice who would have been about ten or eleven years of age. Neither did she have family preservation as her chief motive, or she would have also taken Mary Gregory's older sister, Sarah, who had come with her from Mrs. Green's plantation the preceding autumn.[92]

Siblings were a common occurrence in the business of relief, owing to the especial burden that groups of young children posed to indigent widows and other caretakers. Court records show at least fourteen apparent cases of sibling apprentices, and nearly half were pairs of brothers who were bound out to the same master to learn the same trade; groups that also contained sisters were usually split up, with girls apprenticed as housekeepers or seamstresses.[93] A few individuals took on both male and female apprentices but for different occupations, as exemplified by the Church children. In January 1820, an overseer of the poor brought the five siblings before the Adams County orphan's court. Ruth Emma and Cordelia, aged fourteen and twelve respectively, were bound to Mary Carroll to learn millinery whereas their eight-year-old sister Amouret was bound to planter William Barnard as a housekeeper.[94] Woodson Wren, the court clerk, took as an apprentice ten-year-old Johnston, but his younger brother Daniel, aged six,

[91] Ibid., August 30, 1817.
[92] These children are listed in the Society's care at this time.
[93] Data comes from records of the Spanish provincial period as well as the General Court of Quarter Sessions and the Orphan's Court, created in 1803. In the minutebook from this last body, entries pertaining to indigent orphans end in 1821.
[94] The girls were bound out as "seamstresses." Orphan's Court Minutebook II (February 1815 to January 1820), ACCC, 267.

was only recorded as bound to some "proper person." Reeling at the time from yellow fever and a financial panic, which had struck Mississippi the preceding year, the Female Charitable Society was likely not in a position to take on so many children at once. Indeed, no person ever accepted more than two apprentices simultaneously.

Mrs. Pearse seems to have taken on charity children for reasons other than a need for labor, but sometimes Society officers welcomed them because they were literally homeless. When the matron fell ill in September 1819, the children went to "Mrs. T's," probably Mrs. Eliza Tichenor who was the secretary.[95] The next summer, Second Directress Ann Postlethwaite received an infant from another caretaker and "promised to see Justice done the child."[96] That phrase would appear again in the minutes, as the Society increased the placement of children with local individuals and families. Two weeks after the infant was "placed" with Mrs. Postlethwaite, the officers held a special meeting to discuss the acceptance of additional children and the situation of another. And they were unanimous in the opinion that "it would be much for the Benefit of the little girl Elvira aged 5, to place her under the protection of a Mrs. Chesley a Lady of respectability, who made the benevolent offer of taking said child, and adopting her as her own, and promises to do justice to her."[97] The woman was most likely Ann H. Chesley, who was listed as head of her household in the censuses.[98] Though her agricultural enterprise was modest—six slaves—compared to the holdings of many local

[95] No date for the minutebook entry is given, though September 21, 1819 is mentioned as the date "Mrs. T" took the children. Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[96] Ibid., June 6, 1820.
[97] Ibid., June 19, 1820.
[98] Shown as a resident of Adams County in the territorial census of 1816 and a resident of Jefferson County in the federal census of 1820.

planters, she possessed the means to support a little orphan girl. Whether regarding her "as her own" meant the child would grow up in leisure or at work is unknown, but the familial language is distinct. The reference to "adopting" is a curious inclusion, as Mississippi law held no such provisions. Spanish law allowed individuals to adopt children in certain circumstances, primarily for reasons of inheritance and property conveyance, but in the Anglo-American tradition apprenticeship was then as close as one could come to forging bonds between an adult and a minor who was not his or her natural issue.

During its early years, the Female Charitable Society seems to have relied on informal, though there is mention of directresses "binding" children to individuals. The first evidence of a written instrument, however, surfaces in 1822 between the Society and Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Green. After discussing upon which terms the couple would accept Olivia Wrice, two managers drew up "Articles of Agreement" to make the girl's situation a permanent one:[99]

> This article of agreement witnesseth that the Members of the Female Charitable Society hath placed Olivia Wrice under the care of Mr. and Mrs. Green to continue from the date thereof until she attain the age of eighteen which will be in the year of our Lord 1830.—The said Mr. and Mrs. Green doth bind themselves to give the said Olivia Wrice a good plain education, cloth her genteelly and instill into her mind moral and religious principles.
>
> The said Olivia Wrice must likewise be taught those useful acquirements which will enable her to get an honest living.—We the members of the said Institution desire that she may be permitted to attend Sunday School, and divine service as often as possible.
>
> Eliza Little
> Charity Snodgrass Signed and delivered this 17 day of May

[99] May 6, 1822 and May 14, 1822, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.

Alfred Green

Many similarities exist between the agreement arranged for ten-year-old Olivia Wrice and the indenture executed for Mary Eveson and the other apprentices who emerged from the county court. A term is specified which binds her until age eighteen—the statutory requirement for female apprentices—and there are standard pledges of clothing, education, and vocational instruction (that food, shelter, or washing are not mentioned probably owed to their being considered so essential as to be understood). But Olivia Wrice's "article of agreement" differs from ordinary indentures the nature of basic provisions as well as the greater emphasis on guardians' care rather than the child's duties. Her apparel must be "genteel," and she should receive moral and religious instruction fortified by the attendance of church and Sunday school. The inculcation of religion and morality on "youthful minds" was the Society's primary concern, reflecting members' belief that indigent children could not be raised to support themselves in an honest, respectable manner without those precepts. Managers Eliza Little and Charity Snodgrass left out other aspects common among indentures: no proscriptions are listed for Olivia and nowhere is she referred to as an "apprentice" or Mr. and Mrs. Green as "master" and "mistress." The Society envisioned adult guardians more as parents than employers, yet they did not seem to advocate equal filial treatment. There is no pledge on the part of the Greens that they will raise Olivia as their own, and the stipulation that she receive "a good plain education" indicates that her upbringing was tailored to her condition. Though the state of Mississippi had not authorized the Society to trespass

upon the jurisdiction of county officials and form household bonds, benevolent women did so nonetheless with the intent of creating a good home for their wards.

The Female Charitable Society hoped to improve upon juvenile relief in Mississippi, not only by modifying the type of care that children received but by ensuring them a home environment that was suitable and stable, hence the move to create contractual bonds. The use of indentures, however, did not guarantee stability. Apprentices were regularly cycled through the orphan's court and bound to different masters, some as many as three times.[100] Despite the permanence supposedly engendered by the Society's articles of agreement, Olivia Wrice was returned to the Society only two months after they were signed.[101] Even Mrs. Chesley's pledge to raise Elvira "as her own" in June 1820 withered, as the minutes record the girl's placement with a "Mr.—" the following November.[102] Did the guardians find their charges too unruly? Had the guardians passed away? Were illness or financial downturn preventing them from continuing their care? Or did they decide that they had had enough of supporting a child who was not their own? Unfortunately, explanations almost never accompany returns.

While the Female Charitable Society may not have reformed relief entirely as hoped, many aspects of the statutory system changed in the years after its founding. To begin with, the number of children bound as apprentices by the county declined: At the time the Society members were planning their charitable enterprise and holding their first

[100] For example, Jefferson Hammond appears in the Orphan's Court at one year eight months in 1813 and was apprenticed again in 1815 at the age of three. Harriet Mason was bound in 1813 and again in 1815. Thomas Mason was bound out three times—four if including two transactions made to the same master (no explanation is given as to why). Orphan's Court Minutebook I (April 1803 to January 1815), ACCC.
[101] In a list of children at the end of the last entry for1818, Olivia Wrice appears as "Returned" on July 23, 1822. Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[102] Ibid., November 6, 1820.

meeting, county officials were indenturing more children than ever before. In the years that followed, apprentices roughly paralleled the number of "charity children" under the care of matrons, but by 1823—when several annual reports had been issued making scathing remonstrances against the county and an orphan asylum had at last been constructed—apprenticeship indentures decreased to a trickle. Minors would continue to be bound out by the county, but more often than not they were male and over twelve years of age, whereas apprentices before this date were approximately one-third female and, combined with males, averaged less than eleven years in age. With respect to poor relief, apprenticeship ceased to be the primary means of dealing with prepubescent children and female minors in Adams County.—for those who were white.

Even the language surrounding statutory relief began to change. County officials charged with managing paupers and binding out minors ceased to be called "overseers"—a term which must have evoked images of plantation wardens—and became known instead by the more benign title of "trustees of the poor."[103] On a more substantive level, the efforts of the Female Charitable Society to create alternatives to statutory relief for white prepubescent minors led to permanent changes in juvenile relief in Mississippi. Apprenticeship, that cornerstone of Anglo-American poor laws, was transformed from the universal means of dealing with indigent children to an institution confined to an increasingly narrow class of minors. As of 1829, the wording of the poor relief statute

[103] In 1829, a new law was enacted with respect to "the settlement and relief of the poor," referring to "overseers or trustees of the poor." *Laws of the State of Mississippi, Embracing All Acts of a Public Nature from January Session, 1824, to January Session 1838, Inclusive* (Jackson: State of Mississippi, 1838), 179. Notations began to shift in the deed records around 1822. See for example the indenture of John Bennett, which has signatures from two officials one using the older abbreviation and the other using the new. Deed Record Book M, ACCC, 157.

changed to reflect who had become its principal object: "free negro or mulatto children."[104] The rest of the statute resembles the first one passed in the early territorial period, except now rather than assist all free indigent minors, the county seemed to target only those who were black. Curiously, there are instances of slaves bound out as apprentices.[105] On the cusp of civil war, the very term became a sort of code word for enslavement, a way for supporters of that peculiar institution to preserve it while appearing to have ended it altogether.[106]

Scholars of apprenticeship have generally contended that the practice of binding out boys and girls to adult masters for a specified term, usually until the age of majority, was already waning by the time of the American Revolution, long before benevolent women began agitating for change. These scholars, however, are for the most part concerned with what has been termed artisanal or craft apprenticeship, whose primary purpose was to provide minors a means of acquiring proficiency in manual trades whereby they would earn their living, first as journeymen and then as masters who would

[104] *Laws of the State of Mississippi,*179.
[105] 1838, the "Negro Boy Slave Talbot Bush" was bound out an apprentice for five years. Deed Record Book AA, 295. In 1842, the "slave Augustus, a Yellow Boy" was bound apprentice. Deed Record Book DD, ACCC, 319.
[106] As apprenticeship declined in Natchez as the primary form of welfare for poor and orphaned minors, it gained new esteem among those grappling to maintain an institution that was coming under increasing fire. In May 1859, proslavery theorist Henry Hughes attended a convention in nearby Vicksburg where he presented his report on "the African apprentice system." Pointing to the example of Britain's own creation of long-term apprentices among former slaves in the Caribbean, once slavery was abolished, Hughes argued that apprenticeship contained "the freedom of free labor without its license, and the order of slavery without its tyranny." He does not explain how this new system will differ from enslavement beyond the change of name—indeed, the terms of service seem to remain interminable. This so-called "liberty labor" occupied a middle ground between perpetual servility and freedom, one that he chided the Revolutionary generation for not considering as a preventative measure to the present sectional problem (in truth, many of them had occupied that middle space and rejected it). Henry Hughes, *A Report on the African Apprentice System: Read at the Southern Commercial Convention* (Vicksburg: n.p., 1859).

then perpetuate their skill by taking on their own apprentices.[107] Evidence supports the notion that this method of juvenile education declined during the early republic, as capitalism and expanding industrialization eroded workshop modes of production.[108] As machines began to undercut the cost of manual labor, mass production in factories replaced the crafting of goods in homelike settings; labor gradually became subdivided into repetitive, unskilled tasks, and workers no longer became masters in their own right, instead remaining trapped in a permanent wage-earning journeyman state. Other scholars contend that the decline of artisanal apprenticeship resulted from the breakdown of the traditional family, namely the collapse of patriarchal authority in the eighteenth century and the consequent rise of filial independence.[109] As a result, adult-child relationships

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[107] This view is promulgated in such works as Carl Bridenbaugh's classic monograph *The Colonial Craftsman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961, c1950) and W. J. Rorabaugh's *The Craft Apprentice from Franklin to the Machine Age in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). While there have been numerous recent works on American artisans and craftsmen, most have tended to focus on New England and the Mid-Atlantic, though the Southern region of the United States is gaining attention. See, for example, Michele Gillespie *Free Labor in an Unfree World: White Artisans in Slaveholding Georgia, 1789-1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000). Much of the scholarship on Southern artisans has emerged in article form, such as Christine Daniels, "WANTED: A Blacksmith Who Understands Plantation Work: Artisans in Maryland, 1700-1810": 743-67. An entire section is devoted to the experiences of artisans in the South (including essays by Gillespie and Daniels) in Howard B. Rock et al (Paul A. Gilje, Robert Asher), *American Artisans: Crafting Social Identity, 1750-1850* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

[108] The literature on this subject is vast. Gary J. Kornblith provides a concise yet rich historiographical overview in "The Artisanal Response to the Capitalist Transformation," *Journal of the Early American Republic* 10 (Autumn, 1990): 315-21 as does Richard Stott in "Artisans and Capitalist Development," *Journal of the Early American Republic* 16 (Summer, 1996): 257-71. Of the numerous monographs that have emerged in the past thirty years, most continue in the tradition of Alan Dawley's seminal *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976) by focusing their historical studies on a particular urban area; see also Sean Wilentz*, Chants Democratic: New York City and The Rise of the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984) and Susan E. Hirsch, *Roots of the American Working Class: The Industrialization of Crafts in Newark, 1800-1860* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978). For a more geographically comprehensive examination, see Walter Licht, *Industrializing America: The Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

[109] Bernard Bailyn details his theory of apprenticeship's disintegration in *Education in the Forming of American Society: Needs and Opportunities for Study* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960). Quimby supports Bailyn's theory, yet attributes the decline more to "the process of modernization" and the destructive force of rationalizing human activity, and he cautions against American exceptionalism,

relaxed from rigidly vertical to a power dynamic much more horizontal in nature. This is not to say that onsite vocational training for children ended altogether. Throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth young people continued to learn trades in factories but usually in exchange for meager wages instead of their upkeep and upbringing.[110]

The transformation of apprenticeship cannot be wholly attributed to efforts of benevolent women, but in Natchez at least, something more than coincidence seems to have been at work. Around the 1821, the number of white prepubescent minors bound as apprentices dropped precipitously, the same time when the Female Charitable Society finally established its orphan asylum. Indeed, apprentices bound by the overseers of the poor cease to be recorded in the orphan's court minutes after 1821 and appear only in the deed records. One possible explanation is that there was a drop in the number of young white children who required public assistance, but it seems more likely that benevolent women had successfully diverted them into a system of their making. Rejecting the patriarchal order of the old system of relief, the Society created a new institution that was

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noting for example that apprenticeship began its decline in England much earlier, during the mid-seventeenth century; *Apprenticeship in Colonial Philadelphia*, 3-4, 140-56. Carole Shammas explores the breakdown of patriarchal authority at length in *A History of Household Government in America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002).

[110] Anthony F. C. Wallace notes the presence of wage-earning apprentices in *Rockdale: The Growth of an American Village in the Early Industrial Revolution* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), 148-49. Among the lower classes, it was common for boys and girls to be set to labor, a practice that was losing public support by the turn of the twentieth century, fueled in part by Progressive campaigns to render it illegal. Walter I. Trattner, *Crusade for the Children: A History of the National Child Labor Committee and Child Labor Reform in America* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970). This campaign gained widespread attention with the help of the photographic chronicles of Lewis W. Hine among others; see George Dimock, *Priceless Children: American Photographs 1890-1925: Child Labor and the Pictorialist Ideal* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002). For a comprehensive work on the history of laboring children in the United States, see John Clayton Drew, "Child Labor and Child Welfare: The Origins and Uneven Development of the American Welfare State" (PhD diss., Cornell University, 1988) as well as labor scholar Hugh D. Hindman's recent monograph, *Child labor: An American History* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2002).

decidedly matriarchal in structure. From that time onward, the placing of white children with parent-guardians rather than master-employers became the norm and the foundation of the modern foster care system[111]

Conclusion

From its inception the Female Charitable Society was an institution predicated on laws. The constitution provided a framework for organizational governance, and periodically new rules were adopted to strengthen its efficiency. At the anniversary assembly in 1820, for example, the officers resolved to levy a fine of one dollar on those who did not attend regular meetings "without a good and lawful excuse."[112] Three managers were absent from the next appointed gathering and were consequently ordered to pay a fine.[113] That was just the beginning. Each time the officers met, they seemed intent on refining their operational precision: designating an officer as "speaker"; resolving "that no subject of conversation be introduced, except that most interesting to the advancement of the Institution, until the business of the day is concluded"; agents established in towns around Mississippi as well as in Louisiana; the resolution that

[111] The few scholars who have closely examined pauper apprenticeship note that while the practice diminished in the nineteenth century it did not disappear but persisted until the enactment of child welfare reforms during the Progressive era. John E. Murray and Ruth Wallis Herndon discuss the steady continuation of binding out poor minors in Boston, Rhode Island, and Charleston in "Markets for Children in Early America: A Political Economy of Pauper Apprenticeship," 62 *The Journal of Economic History* (June 2002): 357-61, whereas Murray charts its persistence through 1850 in a separate article, "Fates of Orphans: Poor Children in Antebellum Charleston," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 33 (Spring, 2003): 528-30, 543. Karin L. Zipf notes that apprenticeship remained on the books for poor minors in North Carolina until the state Child Welfare Reform Act was passed in 1919; *Labor of Innocents: Forced Apprenticeship in North Carolina, 1715-1919* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005).
[112] March 6, 1820, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[113] Ibid., April 3, 1820.

clothes would be furnished from their homes and the rest made up by the ladies; the designation of an "Inspector of the clothing."[114]

Over time, the better ordering of the Female Charitable Society began to influence the ordering of society as a whole. Laws passed by the Mississippi legislature were superseded and then modified by benevolent women, who strove to alter the manner in which poor young children were assisted. No one had authorized the ladies to receive indigent minors or place them with families, but this practice appears to have been accepted nonetheless and eventually altered statutory care. The Society took the essence of apprenticeship—household formation—and constructed new practices that elevated the standard of relief to a system based on maternal domesticity. Accordingly, benevolent women became the accepted guardians of white prepubescent minors. Clothes, benevolent networks, and articles of agreement created a protective framework for poor children, but they were not permanent. As benevolent women metamorphosed into civic mothers, they realized that without a home, in the concrete sense of the term, they could not fully realize their charitable aims.

[114] Ibid.

Chapter 5

Sanctuary

> This spot on which we tread, snatched from the rude dominion of the untutored savage and the prowling tiger, can now boast a flourishing city of more than three thousand inhabitants, under the protection of salutary laws, and in possession of that urbanity and refinement of manners which will ever render society agreeable.—This spot, which once echoed the dismal howlings of the wolf, and the frightful yells of the savage at his midnight orgies, is now enlivened by the voice of harmony and the din of industry. Secure from the blood-thirsty cruelties of the tawny natives, you are lulled to sleep in your peaceful habitations by the drowsy hum of the evening, and awakened by the cheerful carols of the morning.[1]

In his oration delivered at the Lancasterian Academy on the evening of March 28, 1817, Samuel Eastman extolled the rise of education in Natchez. To illustrate how far the community had come, he contrasted its present enlightenment with the brutish horrors of its past. Those grisly descriptions may have struck an especially frightening chord among his listeners, for an expansive internal wilderness, teeming with Indians and ferocious beasts, separated Mississippi from East Coast civilization. As Eastman spoke of "blood-thirsty cruelties" in the dim of candlelight, some listeners may have called to mind the terrible stories of what had happened nearly a hundred years earlier on that spot. The violence that had erupted there between white settlers and indigenous peoples was seared into public memory.

[1] From Samuel Eastman's oration delivered at the Natchez Lancastrian Academy held on March 28, 1817. Printed in *Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer*, April 9, 1817.

When Natchez was Fort Rosalie, the first French colony on the Mississippi River, it was the target of a great Indian uprising.[2] On the morning of November 28, 1729, a little more than a decade after the settlement was founded, the Natchez nation launched a surprise assault against the inhabitants in retaliation for their unrelenting encroachment. White men were the primary target, but according to eyewitness accounts, the Indians also "slashed open the abdomens of all pregnant women, and they slew nearly all those who were nursing infants, because they were annoyed by their screams and tears."[3] Nearly one half of the inhabitants were killed, and the others were carried off as captives. Fort Rosalie never recovered from the violent attack, and New Orleans subsequently became the predominant community in the region.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, a French nobleman and writer visited Mississippi and made the attack the subject of his next novel. The Vicomte de

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[2] There is no single scholarly monograph devoted to the event which has become known as the "Natchez War." The most thorough analyses have come from Daniel H. Usner, who details the event and examines Natchez culture as well as longstanding Indian-European "borderlands" tensions in *American Indians in the Lower Mississippi Valley: Social and Economic Histories* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 16-32. Usner takes another look at the Natchez War in *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 65-76. In this work, Usner notes that "145 men, 36 women, and 56 children" were killed while "nearly 300 Negro slaves in addition to some 50 white women and children" were taken captive. While enslaved Africans briefly aided the Natchez, they were subsequently taken by the French-allied Choctaws and probably resold into slavery. See also Patricia Dillon Woods, *French-Indian Relations on the Southern Frontier, 1699-1763* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980) as well as J. F. H. Claiborne, *Mississippi as a Province, Territory and State,* Volume 1 (Jackson, MS: Power and Barksdale, 1880), 42-50, and H.B. Cushman, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Natchez Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), a reprint of his book written a century earlier.

[3] Mathurin Le Petit, a Jesuit priest residing in New Orleans at the time, recorded the events as related by survivors in a letter to his superior; *The Natchez Massacre*, trans. Richard H. Hart (New Orleans: Poor Rich Press, 1950), 30. A few French women and children were spared as well as several hundred enslaved Africans, and all were taken away as captives. Upon learning of the assault, soldiers from New Orleans set out for the fort, located one hundred leagues to the north, and soon recovered the prisoners. Although the Indians had launched the assault to rid their land of encroaching Europeans, it was they who were ultimately expelled. Sold into slavery and scattered among other nations, the Natchez were gone from the vicinity of Fort Rosalie within two years—all that remained was their soaring earthen structures and their name. The community became known as "Natchez" because colonial settlements often took the names of nearby Indian nations.

Chateaubriand's *Atala, or The Love and Constancy of Two Savages in the Desert* was a sensation throughout Europe and America when it came out in 1801, and for years, visitors to Natchez could not help but view the place through the novel's lens.[4] Presbyterian minister Timothy Flint, for example, found Natchez to be "romantically situated," when he traveled there in 1822, adding that "here too you see the ruins of Fort Rosalie, and the scene of the wild, but splendid and affecting romance of Atala."[5] The diminishment of Indian threat allowed the region to appear pleasing and picturesque, but Flint also noted, with disdain, that a new form of savagery had moved into the area—especially under the hill.[6]

Fort Rosalie was nothing more than a pile of sticks and rubble by the early nineteenth century, but down the river in New Orleans stood an edifice that represented the outcome of that tragic episode. Early in 1730, the survivors escaped from their Indian captors and made their way to that French settlement, where they set about to repair their fractured households. New Orleans was younger than the ill-fated fort by a year, yet it was more secure and prosperous.[7] There, the women quickly found new husbands, and most of the orphaned children were welcomed into other families. However, there

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[4] *Atala* was translated into English and published in the United States as early as 1802; numerous editions appeared throughout the nineteenth century. Gordon M. Sayre, "Plotting the Natchez Massacre: Le Page du Pratz, Dumont de Montigny, Chateaubriand," *Early American Literature* 37 (2002): 381-413.

[5] Timothy Flint, *Recollections of the Last Ten Years in the Valley of the Mississippi*, Ed. George R. Brooks (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968), 213; a reprint of the original 1826 edition.

[6] Of Natchez-Under-the-Hill, he wrote: "The town is full of boatmen, mulattoes, houses of ill fame, and their wretched tenants, in short, the refuse of the world. The fiddle screaks jargon from these *faucibus orci*. You see the unhappy beings dancing; and here they have what are called 'rows,' which often end in murder." Ibid.

[7] For a brief overview of the development of Fort Rosalie (founded in 1716) in relation to New Orleans (founded in 1717), see D. Clayton James; *Antebellum Natchez* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 9-11.

remained a group of "little girls whom none of the colonists wished to adopt."[8] As luck would have it, seven Ursuline nuns had arrived from France a few years before to create a school for girls, and there seems to have been little question that the homeless children should be placed with them. After all, the nuns were already rearing a "cherished troop of orphans," according to the priest who chronicled the events of that winter.[9] He did not say precisely when or how the Ursulines expanded their charitable scope from instructing young females to providing them full support, but as a result of the 1729 "massacre," this convent in French America came to be regarded as the first orphan asylum in what is now the United States.[10]

About ten years later, immigrants from Salzburg built a small orphanage in the new colony of Georgia, and shortly afterwards another was established there by famed evangelical minister George Whitefield. Then in the wake of the Revolution, the city fathers of Charleston founded a municipal orphanage, but these were the only ones to appear in British America.[11] To be sure, hospitals and poorhouses frequently accepted poor and parentless children.[12] However, institutions that catered exclusively to the care of young destitute minors did not proliferate until the early republic, when affluent, Protestant, white women began to organize them.

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[8] Le Petit, *The Natchez Massacre*, 30
[9] Ibid.
[10] One of the earliest historians to make this assertion was Homer Folks, a career social worker who chronicled American child welfare in *The Care of Destitute, Neglected, and Delinquent Children* (New York: The Macmillan Company 1902), 9. Despite its age, this work continues to serve as a key secondary text on the history of early orphan asylums.
[11] These will be discussed at length in this chapter.
[12] Many communities constructed hospitals and almshouses, both of which regularly received children, yet they were not designed specifically for the care of minors. See Michael Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse* (New York: Basic Books, 1983) and Walter I. Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America*, 6th ed. (New York: Free Press, 1998).

The Natchez Female Charitable Society did not initially pursue institutional relief. Instead, benevolent women in Mississippi focused on the creation of a charity school, which they accomplished less than a year after launching their benevolent venture. Yet almost as soon as the school was built and the first public examination held, an event crowned by Mr. Eastman's stirring oration, the ladies changed their minds. At the annual meeting in 1819, they announced that they were raising funds to establish an "Orphan Asylum."[13] While the members of the Natchez Society do not elucidate the reasons for shifting focus, they express in their writings a sentiment similar to that of the benevolent women of Portsmouth, New Hampshire—that poor children required "something like parental care" more urgently than charity schooling.[14] In other words, rescuing young minds required boys and girls to be placed in a household that served as both classroom and shelter, a household managed and governed by women.

Problems with charity schooling and dissatisfaction with statutory relief certainly led the Natchez Female Charitable Society to seek an alternate form of care. But how the Society came to advance an orphan asylum in particular is best understood through examining two principal trajectories. One is the narrower path of local exigencies. What was occurring in the community that suddenly caused Society members to change course? The other is the broader arc of the development of residential relief for children in the United States. Central to the broader arc is the question: Why did these institutions not proliferate around the country until the turn of the nineteenth century? In a similar

[13] From the annual report, April 5, 1819, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[14] March 12, 1816, Ibid. Timothy Alden, *A Discourse Delivered Before the Members of the Portsmouth Female Asylum* (Portsmouth, NH: J. Melcher, 1804), 10-11

vein, if the events of 1729 led to the "first" American asylum in New Orleans, why would nearly a hundred years pass before one was established in Natchez, the site of the catastrophe that had led to the initial group of orphans?[15] No subsequent large-scale Indian attack occurred at Natchez, but myriad other dangers threatened poor children. While disease was perhaps the most devastating, documentary evidence shows that adults were proving similarly pernicious.

Religious Roots of Residential Care

It is a truism that European nations fashioned American colonies in their own images. New France was not France per se, but French settlers in the Lower Mississippi Valley constructed communities that bore many resemblances to the home country.[16] Therefore, when the children of Fort Rosalie straggled into New Orleans, the thought of placing some of them with the Ursulines seemed a matter of course. For centuries, religious orders had provided shelter and support to the destitute and homeless, but in the wake of the Catholic Reformation, female orders had become especially active in caring for orphans. The idealistic Ursulines who ventured to Louisiana early in its colonial period were seen by inhabitants as a civilizing force. With respect to the girls in their care, a New Orleans priest opined that "there is not a single one of this saintly community who is not delighted to have crossed the seas, nor believes she can do greater good here

[15] This study does not include Canada or Latin America but focuses on communities and territories that would later make up the present United States.
[16] For a general overview of French colonial history in Louisiana, see Marcel Giraud, *A History of French Louisiana*, trans. Joseph C. Lambert (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974) and Glenn R. Conrad, ed., *The French Experience in Louisiana* (Lafayette: University of Southern Louisiana Press, 1995).

than to keep the children in innocence, and to give the young French a polite, Christian education, since these are in danger of being hardly better reared than slaves."[17] The same citizens who had declined to adopt the homeless girls were glad to have them lodged with the nuns. By raising white orphaned girls to be useful and respectable women—in a manner that befit their gender, race, and humble status—the Ursulines were seen to be ensuring the colony's growth and enhancing its prosperity.[18]

Nuns who performed this kind of charitable labor in Europe were very often assisted by lay confraternities made up of benevolent women who declined to take the veil yet who wished to strengthen their personal piety through voluntary service.[19]

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[17] Le Petit, *The Natchez Massacre*, 30.

[18] On the early history of the New Orleans Ursulines, see Emily Clark, *Masterless Mistresses: The New Orleans Ursulines and the Development of a New World Society, 1727-1834* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007). For more on the significance of female education to the French colonial project, see Clark Robenstine, "French Colonial Policy and the Education of Women and Minorities: Louisiana in the Early Eighteenth Century," *History of Education Quarterly* 32 (Summer 1992): 193-211.

[19] Among the numerous works detailing the involvement of Catholic orders with juvenile relief, see Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns Through Two Millennia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); Merry Wiesner-Hanks, ed., *Convents Confront the Reformation: Catholic and Protestant Nuns in Germany*, trans. Joan Skocir and Merry Wiesner-Hanks (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1996); Bruce L. Venarde, *Women's Monasticism and Medieval Society: Nunneries in France and England, 890-1215* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Barbara B. Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity: Pious Women and the Catholic Reformation in Paris* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Hazel Mills, "'La Charité est une Mère': Catholic Women and Poor Relief in France, 1690-1850" in Hugh Cunningham and Joanna Innes, eds., *Charity, Philanthropy and Reform, from the 1690s to 1850* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998). See also Barbara A. Hanawalt, *The Ties That Bound: Peasant Families in Medieval England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) and John Henderson and Richard Wall, eds., *Poor Women and Children in the European Past* (New York: Routledge, 1994). On hospitals and relief for children; Linda Martz, *Poverty and Welfare in Habsburg Spain: The Example of Toledo* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 221-36; Maureen Flynn, *Sacred Charity: Confraternities and Social Welfare in Spain, 1400-1700* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 58-59. See also Anne J. Cruz, *Discourses of Poverty: Social Reform and the Picaresque Novel in Early Modern Spain* (Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1999) on poor relief as well as portrayals of poor children in literature. Founded in Italy in the early sixteenth century, an order of Ursulines established in France by the early seventeenth century, provided boarding and education for young noble girls; R. Po-chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540-1770* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998). They also later expanded their work to orphanages; Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 460-61 free teaching of girls in Paris order, 470. There was as long tradition of lay women benefited from spiritual conversations and convents benefited from their benevolence; Diefendorf, 124-31.

Common throughout France, this model was transplanted in New France as well, first in Quebec and then in Louisiana.[20] Shortly after the Ursulines took in the orphaned girls of Ft. Rosalie, a group of women formed the Ladies Congregation of the Children of Mary as an auxiliary to their order. Unlike some female confraternities in France, the Children of Mary drew members not only from the upper classes but from across the social spectrum, including free women of color.[21] Quietly, the nuns professed that they found the orphans to be "crude and ill-mannered," a sentiment which the "Ladies" may have shared, but they continued their work nonetheless.[22] Overall, the community nursery fostered by the nuns and laywomen was esteemed for providing essential support for poor

[20] McNamara, 482-85. Barbara B. Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity: Pious Women and the Catholic Reformation in Paris* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 210-16. E. K. Sanders, *Vincent de Paul: Priest and Philanthropist, 1576-1660*, (London: Heath, Cranton & Ouseley, 1913), 67; Cyprian W. Emanuel, *The Charities of Vincent de Paul: An Evaluation of His Ideas, Principles and Methods*, (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1923), 103. Though most of the secondary works pertaining to Vincent de Paul were written in the early twentieth century, Bernard Pujo's *Vincent de Paul, The Trailblazer*, trans. Gertrud Graubart Champe (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003) discusses the work of the Daughters and Ladies at length. On the establishment of female religious life in New France, see Leslie Choquette, "'Ces Amazones du Grand Dieu': Women and Mission in Seventeenth-Century Canada," *French Historical Studies* 17 (Spring 1992): 627-655.

[21] Emily Clark provides a detail account of the Children of Mary as well as their seventeenth-century French antecedents in "'By All the Conduct of Their Lives': A Laywomen's Confraternity in New Orleans, 1730-1744," *William and Mary Quarterly* 54 (October 1997): 769-94. This cooperation of laywomen and religious orders followed a French Catholic tradition begun nearly a century earlier. Vincent de Paul encouraged the great ladies of Paris to form a confraternity as a philanthropic, fundraising auxiliary to the Sisters of Charity, which he had founded in 1633. They called themselves the Ladies of Charity, and they created an administrative system, including elected offices (a president and two assistants), to render their benevolence all the more efficient. In Paris and New Orleans, religious women helped transform juvenile relief from monastic seclusion and free dispensation of alms to community collaboration and support combined with education. Vincent de Paul was concerned at the disorganized state of charity in Paris at the turn of the sixteenth century—some received too little while others not enough. He set about to resolve this problem through systematic relief and so founded the order of the Daughters of Charity devoted to "practical philanthropy." E. K. Sanders, *Vincent de Paul: Priest and Philanthropist, 1576-1660*, (London: Heath, Cranton & Ouseley, 1913), 67; Cyprian W. Emanuel, *The Charities of Vincent de Paul: An Evaluation of His Ideas, Principles and Methods*, (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1923), 103. Though most of the secondary works pertaining to Vincent de Paul were written in the early twentieth century, Bernard Pujo's *Vincent de Paul, The Trailblazer*, trans. Gertrud Graubart Champe (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003) discusses the work of both the "Daughters" and "Ladies" at length.

[22] Clark, "'By All the Conduct of Their Lives': A Laywomen's Confraternity in New Orleans, 1730-1744," 785.

young children. Furthermore, the opportunity it offered for the pursuit of active Christianity, an increasingly important tenet of early modern Catholicism.[23] Though the confraternity disbanded after nearly a decade and a half, the Ursulines continued to house orphans until the city transferred them to a new, Protestant asylum early in the next century.[24]

While New Orleans thrived, Natchez remained largely empty after the Indian attack. When Britain gained control of the settlement at the end of the Seven Years' War, however Anglo-Americans began to move there and build a new community upon the old ruins, importing with them institutions of civil governance.[25] There is one recorded instance of orphaned girls sent from Natchez to the Ursuline convent in New Orleans, not because they were homeless but because their guardian found them "continually in company with evil disposed persons, receiving from them bad advice."[26] On the whole, outdoor relief—bound apprenticeship and informal placement—as practiced throughout British America was the norm in Natchez, even after the region became a province of Spain.[27] After this latest imperial takeover, Natchez was officially a Catholic

[23] Ibid., 770-77.
[24] Emily Clark discusses the transfer of orphans from the Ursuline convent to the Poydras Female Orphan Asylum in 1824 in *Masterless Mistresses*, chap. 7.
[25] On the cession of French lands in 1763 as well as Natchez under British rule, see James, *Antebellum Natchez*, 11-30. Robert V. Haynes provides one of the most detailed accounts of British Natchez, from 1763 to the failed rebellion of 1781 in *The Natchez District and the American Revolution* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1976). Though chronologically disjointed, another good overview appears in Claiborne, *Mississippi as a Province, Territory and State*, 92-134.
[26] The "orphans" were the children of John Alston, who had unsuccessfully rebelled against the new Spanish government and fled to Indian country. The governor of Natchez appointed Alexander McIntosh as the children's guardian, and he requested to send the girls to the convent and place the boys in trade in New Orleans. Dated July 29, 1781, this guardian appointment is the first recorded entry in the Spanish provincial records for Natchez. May Wilson McBee, *The Natchez Court Records, 1767-1805: Abstracts of Early Records* Vol. 2 (Greenville, MS, 1954), 1.
[27] In 1779, Spain joined France in declaring war on Britain. The Lower Mississippi Valley thus became a new front in the imperial conflict that had emerged from a domestic revolution. Natchez was quickly

community, yet except for an empty chapel staffed by a few Irish priests, Catholic institutions found few followers there and inhabitants remained staunchly, albeit nominally, Protestant.[28]

New Orleans could have served as a model settlement, given that it was the only major European outpost for many miles. The orphanage at the Ursuline convent and recently-dissolved Ladies Congregation of the Children of Mary could have informed the development of child welfare in Natchez, but this was not the case. An urban center that was both French and Catholic could not hope to inspire Anglo-American Protestants, who seethed centuries' worth of suspicion and abhorrence towards all things "papist." Indeed, the notion of cloistered celibate women, no matter how charitable, struck most Protestants as antithetical to nature and the divinely-sanctioned family order. Rejecting Catholic institutions, Natchezians patterned their laws and infrastructure according to

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captured as a prize, but in 1781, about two hundred of its inhabitants organized a counterattack against the Catholic aggressors. Though successful in wresting control of the fort, the Natchez "rebels" were divided about whether to fly the American or English flag. The matter became moot when Spanish forces regained control soon thereafter. However, rather than continue to administer Natchez from New Orleans, the capital of the Province of Louisiana, the Spanish sent a governor to preside directly over the community to better keep the peace. Haynes devotes a great deal of attention to the Spanish conquest of British Natchez, including the "rebellion" of 1781, in *The Natchez District and the American Revolution*. See also James, *Antebellum Natchez*, 25-28. For an excellent overview of imperial contests and colonial development in the Lower Mississippi Valley in the late eighteenth century, see the introduction in Margaret Fisher Dalrymple, ed., *The Merchant of Manchac: The Letterbooks of John Fitzpatrick 1768-1790* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978). This Irish merchant lived just south of Natchez, and his letters capture much about life and business in a fledgling Anglo-American community.

[28] The first Protestant church was established in the region by Congregationalist minister Samuel Swayze, who had brought a number of families with him in 1774. Though the new Spanish government forbade public preaching by Protestants, a proclamation was issued in 1788 to allow toleration of services as long as they were conducted in private homes. Non-Catholics were even allowed to own lands without converting. These extraordinary measures were allowed to the predominately Anglo-American populace of Southwestern Mississippi because Spain wished to maintain it as a buffer against increasing encroachment of the United States. James, *Antebellum Natchez*, 38-40.

their native communities along the Eastern seaboard and their ancestral country across the Atlantic, where orphanages were largely absent.[29]

There were, however, at least two exceptions—two "orphan houses" built in Georgia around ten years after the Ursulines accidentally began theirs in New Orleans. The first was in Ebenezer, a settlement of Protestant Salzburgers just outside Savannah.[30] Having fled Catholic Austria because of religious persecution, the immigrants found safe haven in the new British colony. Upon their arrival in 1734, the Salzburgers constructed an orphan house, for many of the children lacked parents and more became homeless as harsh conditions claimed the lives of settlers. English minister George Whitefield visited the community a few years later and commented favorably on the arrangement, professing a desire to establish one himself in Savannah.[31] "When I came to Georgia, I

[29] "Vehement objections to these 'prisons of confiding girls' (all nineteenth-century American nuns adhered to the rule of enclosure) derived from twinned anxieties of middle-class masculinity: an envious hostility toward the unbridled sexuality allegedly enjoyed by the priest, who, free from the burden of economic competition and family responsibility, circulated like a vagrant pleasure principle through the minds of Protestant clergy, workers, and professionals and a competitive attack on a rival form of masculine authority, which, in its theological and often ethnic difference, formed part of a dangerous public space that encroached on the privacy of the family. Convent interiors, then, registered the tensions of Protestant familial interiors while thwarting domesticity's hegemonic claims. As a subversive re-formation of the self's relation to family and the family's position in society, convents also challenged middle-class Protestant boundaries between public and private. Too intimate, too collective, too formalized, convent communities departed from republican ideals of neighborly individualism." Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 126; 112- 134. See also William M. Shea, *The Lion and the Lamb: Evangelicals and Catholics in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 85-122.

[30] On the emigration of Salzburgers to Georgia and their establishment of an orphan house at Ebenezer, see P. A. Strobel, *The Salzburgers and Their Descendants* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1953); George Fenwick Jones, *The Salzburger Saga: Religious Exiles and Other Germans Along the Savannah* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1984); and idem., *The Georgia Dutch: From the Rhine and Danube to the Savannah, 1733-1783* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1992), 13-21, 117-19. For a first-hand account, see Samuel Urlsperger, *Detailed Reports on the Salzburger Emigrants Who Settled in America*, ed. George Fenwick Jones, trans. Hermann J. Lacher (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1968).

[31] "They have likewise an Orphan House, in which are seventeen children and one widow, and I was much delighted to see the regularity wherewith it is managed." William V. Davis, ed., *George Whitefield's*

found many poor Orphans, who…were in miserable Circumstances," he explained of his motives. "For want of a House to breed them up in, the poor little Ones were tabled out here and there, and besides the Hurt they received by bad Examples, forgot at home what they learnt at School." [32] Bethesda, as the orphan house was named, opened in 1740 and like the one at Ebenezer accepted children of both sexes, many of whom were not "true" orphans.[33]

Families in Ebenezer and Savannah could have welcomed the children, but they did not. In both communities, gathering poor and orphaned boys and girls into a central residence—where they would be raised by a select few and supported by everyone—was deemed the better course. This idea had not come from any Catholic example but from the orphan house established in Halle, Saxony by Pietist minister August Hermann Francke.[34] Constructed at the turn of the seventeenth century, it became famous throughout Protestant Europe, and Johann Martin Boltzius, the spiritual leader of the Salzburger settlement in Georgia, had taught there.[35] Moreover, George Whitfield had read and admired Francke's widely translated book, *Pietas Hallensis*, which described its

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Journals (Gainsville: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1969), 153. Strobel describes Whitefield's visit in *The Salzburgers and Their Descendants*, 109-11.

[32] George Whitefield, *A Brief Account of the Rise Progress, and Present Situation of the Orphan-House, in Georgia* (Philadelphia: W. Bradford, 1746), 53. In this publication, Whitefield gives credit to Charles Wesley and James Oglethorpe for the idea of the orphan house, 51.

[33] The most recent monograph on the orphan house at Savannah is Edward J. Cashin, *Beloved Bethesda: A History of George Whitefield's Home for Boys, 1740-2000* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2001). Contrary to this title, girls were admitted to Bethesda through the early nineteenth century.

[34] Most of the scholarship pertaining to August Hermann Francke pertains to his Pietist theology. For biographical overview, including his work establishing an orphan house, see Erich Beyreuther, *August Hermann Francke, 1663-1727, Zeuge des lebendigen Gottes* (Marburg: Francke-Buchhandlung, 1956). See also Richard L. Gawthrop, *Pietism and the Making of Eighteenth-Century Prussia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Studies of the orphan houses of colonial Georgia usually discuss Francke and his orphan house at Halle.

[35] George Fenwick Jones, *The Georgia Dutch: From the Rhine and Danube to the Savannah, 1733-1783*, 21, 117.

founding.[36] According to Francke, his venture into institutional relief had been somewhat inadvertent. After launching a little school for poor children, Francke observed—with great consternation—that the good lessons instilled upon students were regularly unraveled by their dissolute parents. He realized that piety and morality would never be truly learned unless reinforced by a wholesome home life.[37] Regularly policing the domiciles of the indigent was impracticable, so Francke developed the idea of bringing their children under a single roof so he and his assistants could guide them onto a better path.[38]

Religious orders had maintained residential institutions for foundlings and other abandoned children on the European continent since medieval times, but Francke was one of the first to erect a building for boys and girls who were not all parentless. With the help of pious, wealthy benevolents and royal patrons, the institution was completed in 1695. Francke did not explain why he called his institution an "orphan house," when

[36] Referring to his own institution, Whitefield wrote in a published account, "Were all the particular Providences that have attended this Work recorded, perhaps they would be found not inferior to those mentioned by Professor Frank, in his *Pietas Hallensis*, whose Memory is very precious to me, and whose Example has a Thousand Times been blessed to strengthen and encourage me in the carrying on this Enterprize." Whitefield, *A Brief Account of the Rise Progress, and Present Situation of the Orphan-House, in Georgia*, 58.

[37] "But now I saw how all our Endeavours, even upon these very Children which seem'd the most hopeful, were very much Frustrated; because those good Impressions, which perhaps during their stay in the School were stamped on their Mind, were obliterated again whilst they were abroad: and so the intended Rectification of their ill Habits was much Obstructed. This made me resolve to single out some Children, and to venture upon their Maintenance and their Education too. And this was the first Occasion that prepared my Mind to concert Measures for setting up an Hospital, even before I knew of any Fund whereon to raise my Design," August Hermann Francke, *Pietas Hallensis* (London: J. Downing, 1705), 18. The circumstances that led him to establish an orphan house are detailed on pages 18-34.

[38] "By such Undertakings therefore the Country will be clear'd by degrees of Stubborn Beggars, Thieves, Murderers, High-way Men, Foot-Pads, and the whole pack of loose and debauch'd People, who (as we may find if we search into the true Reasons of such overflowing Wickedness) commonly let loose the Reins to Disorder and Impiety, because they never imbibed so much as the least tincture of a good Education. Now an Undertaking of this kind, may prove a real Foundation of putting some stop to the fierce torrent of such headstrong Vices, and so conduce both to the Spiritual and Temporal good of the whole Country." Ibid., 100.

parentless children comprised only a portion of the residents.[39] Nevertheless, the term "orphan" became shorthand for all those who were young, poor, and neglected. As the minister had noticed during his early experiments, boys and girls with families could suffer as much, perhaps more, as children who lacked a relative in the world.

Following in the footsteps of Francke, Reverend Whitefield enforced a strict regimen on the orphan house residents, organizing their days around study and prayer as well as a great deal of work in preparation for their being bound out as laborers. At least one of the colony's trustees complained that the children were managed too severely, and the Methodist minister was suspected of using his orphan house primarily as "a school or seminary to breed up those of his sect."[40] To be sure, Bethesda proved a powerful engine in advancing his faith, and not only among the children. Even before leaving England, Whitefield preached extensively to drum up support for the orphan house. In America, he took his sermons on the road and spoke before vast crowds all along the Eastern Seaboard, ostensibly to benefit Bethesda, but more particularly to awaken colonists spiritually. His influence on that front was enormous.[41]

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[39] At first he refers to the residence as a "hospital" but later calls it a house, perhaps because he looked into Dutch examples as a model for his own. "But the setting up of Hospitals being yet an uncommon thing in this Country, I resolved to make some Enquiry into the Nature of such as had been Erected in other parts; and because the Accounts which wither in Print or Manuscript came to my Hands about this Affair, did not satisfy me; I farther resolved to send the aforesaid *George Henry Newbauer* into *Holland*, the Seat of good Charity-Schools and Colleges of this Nature." This suggests that he may have looked to the municipal orphanages of Amsterdam as examples. Francke, *Pietas Hellensis*, 27. Francke suggests that poor children with dissipated parents prompted him to pursue maintenance as well as instruction, though he mentions that he also sought out "fatherless" children as well. Ibid., 19.

[40] Quoted in Cashin, *Beloved Bethesda*, 43.

[41] George Whitefield features in numerous scholarly works on the Great Awakening. For more recent biographical portrayals, see Frank Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity: George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals, 1737-1770* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1994) and Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991).

George Whitefield's roaming promotion of hopeful conversions throughout America and its far-reaching effects during the mid eighteenth century have been well chronicled by historians of religion.[42] And scholars of child welfare in the United States usually include mention of Bethesda as a milestone, one of the earliest institutions in the country devoted exclusively to the care and support of minors. However, there have been few questions in either camp as to why Whitefield did not seek to establish orphan houses in other colonies, or why the colonists seemed largely indifferent to following his example on this point. Bethesda could have inspired the formation of similar institutions in urban centers throughout the East Coast, yet it did not. Why?

The thought of building an orphan house had occurred to at least one American—Benjamin Franklin—though he receives little credit for it. Normally characterized as a paragon of charity, Franklin is often portrayed as a skinflint in an episode from his *Autobiography* regarding the peripatetic minister. Here is the passage quoted by historians to demonstrate the power of Whitefield's oratory over a reluctant Franklin:

> I happened soon after to attend one of his sermons, in the course of which I perceived he intended to finish with a collection, and I silently resolved he should get nothing from me. I had in my pocket a handful of copper money, three or four silver dollars, and five pistoles in gold. As he proceeded, I began to soften and concluded to give the coppers. Another stroke of his oratory made me ashamed of that and determined me to give

[42] There are numerous popular and scholarly works on the Great Awakening. See, for example, Frank Lambert, *Inventing the "Great Awakening"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), C. C. Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England, 1740-1800: Strict Congregationalist and Separate Baptists in the Great Awakening* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American mind, from the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966). One of several works which offers a compilation of primary documents is Richard L. Bushman, *The Great Awakening: Documents on the Revival of Religion, 1740-1745* (New York: Atheneum, 1970). The English-language publication of *Pietas Hallensis* around 1705 coincided with a period of spiritual renewal in the Anglican Church. Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 32-34.

> the silver; and he finished so admirably that I emptied my pocket wholly into the collector's dish, gold and all.[43]

Franklin did not despise the minister—far from it. He regularly printed Whitefield's sermons and made great profits from doing so. Indeed, Franklin admired the orphan house project, but it was the execution that troubled him. Accordingly, he was reluctant to give Bethesda any support.[44] "I did not disapprove of the design," Franklin wrote in his autobiography, "but as Georgia was then destitute of materials and workmen and it was proposed to send them from Philadelphia at great expense, I thought it would have been better to have built the house here and brought the children to it. This I advised, but he was resolute in his first project and rejected my counsel, and I thereupon refused to contribute."[45] As Franklin makes clear, his determination to withhold his money came not from stinginess but from prudence. It made little sense to him to construct an orphan house in the wilderness when a community like Philadelphia was better equipped to care for needy children, though his resolve to give nothing was weakened by the force of the minister's emotional appeals.

To Whitefield, the orphan house arrangement made perfect sense: Georgia was virgin territory, ready to receive his personal stamp. And judging by the minister's later actions, it seems that reforming child welfare was not the only project he had in mind. For years Whitefield sought a royal charter to turn Bethesda into a college, an exalted

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[43] Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography and Other Writings* (New York: Signet Classic, 1961), 118.
[44] "The sight of [the children's] miserable situation inspired the benevolent heart of Mr. Whitefield with the idea of building an orphan house there in which they might be supported and educated. Returning northward he preached up this charity and made large collections; for his eloquence had a wonderful power over the hearts and purses of his hearers, of which I myself was an instance." Ibid., 117-18. Franklin mentions that there were others who shared his opinion in this matter and had purposely left behind their money before attending the sermon so as not succumb to Whitefield's mellifluous entreaties.
[45] Ibid.

development he never accomplished.[46] Why Franklin did not himself promote the establishment of an orphan house is unknown, yet his upbringing as an apprentice may have led him to consider that institution as sound as any for the paupers of Pennsylvania. Indeed, colonists elsewhere may have considered residential relief too much trouble and too superfluous to replace a centuries-old system of public support.

In studies of early American child welfare, the orphan houses of colonial Georgia are often discussed in conjunction with the Ursuline convent in New Orleans as seminal forms of juvenile residential care, yet this casual association obscures the subtle yet fundamental differences between two sectarian forms. In the Catholic model, children of a single-sex were reared by a monastic order of the same gender. Though joining the Ursuline nuns in their religious vocation was a possible path for the orphaned girls in their care, they could also reject that path for the opposite course of becoming wives and mothers and forming households quite unlike the one in which they had grown up. The Protestant orphan houses of Georgia, on the other hand, mirrored contemporary Protestant households. They encompassed both boys and girls who were destined for trade or service and, eventually, conjugal domesticity as well. Furthermore, they were structured along patriarchal lines: George Whitefield and Johann Boltzius of Ebenezer served as *paterfamilias* of their institutions: governing the establishment, how the children were raised, and ensuring that they were amply provided for. Families throughout British America tended to adhere to a similar arrangement, with the

[46] Cashin notes that Whitefield planned to open an academy first and then have it elevated to a college. An academy was opened but lasted for only a short time as it failed to attract students. *Beloved Bethesda*, 92, 139. Whitefield informed Franklin of his intent the last time they met; *Autobiography*, 119.

husband/father as household head as well as governor and "moral overseer" of his wife, children, and servants.[47] August Hermann Francke had cultivated family order in his orphan house at Halle, appropriating paternal authority from natural fathers and mothers and rearing certain poor children according to his notions of proper upbringing. Captain Thomas Coram, who organized the celebrated Foundling Hospital in London in 1739, achieved a similar role and became regarded as a savior of innocents. [48]

The groups who established orphan houses in America during the colonial period also shared religious motivations. After the Revolution, a new orphan house was launched as a principally secular enterprise, yet it followed the same patriarchal household structure. Founded in 1789, the orphan house of Charleston, South Carolina resulted more from patriotic fervor than evangelical impulses.[49] Unlike those in

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[47] John Demos, "The Changing Faces of Fatherhood," in *Past, Present and Personal: The Family and the Life Course in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 45. See also Carole Shammas, *A History of Household Government in America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), chaps. 2, 4; John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony*, 2nd. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), chaps. 5-7; Philip Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America*, (1977; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 22-27, 32-42, 99-107. Carl Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 3-25.

[48] Whitfield did not attempt to establish an orphan house in his native England, perhaps because an old sea captain, who was alarmed by the rising number of abandoned infants in London, had been laboring since the 1720s to construct one. In 1739, Captain Thomas Coram was granted a royal charter for his Foundling Hospital and received inmates soon thereafter. This institution was initially founded for infants, though many inmates stayed through childhood and were later placed out as servants and laborers. See Ruth K. McClure, *Coram's Children: The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) and R. H. Nichols, *The History of the Foundling Hospital* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935).

[49] While there have been no monographs of the Charleston Orphan House, a thorough discussion of its rise and significance can be found in Barbara L. Bellows, *Benevolence Among Slaveholders: Assisting the Poor in Charleston, 1670-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), chap. 5. A brief history of the institution as well as transcriptions of many of its records, such as details pertaining to inmates' admission and indenture, can be found in Susan L. King, comp., *History and Records of the Charleston Orphan House, 1780-1860* (Easley, SC: Southern Historical Press, 1984). Thomas A. Hacsi also looks at this insitution in *Second Home: Orphan Asylums and Poor Families in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997). There have also been several articles examining the institution, including John. E. Murray and Ruth Wallis Herndon, "Markets for Children in Early America: A Political Economy of Pauper

Louisiana and Georgia, the Charleston Orphan House was a municipal endeavor, organized by city fathers as an "institution of national virtue."[50] A municipal juvenile residence was not without precedent, for Protestant officials in Amsterdam had operated orphan houses since the late sixteenth century.[51] Supported by tax revenues as well as voluntary contributions and managed by the community's leading men, the Charleston Orphan House did not replace apprenticeship but, like Whitefield's Bethesda, served to augment that longstanding form of juvenile relief by bringing young white boys and girls under a single roof and binding them out at a later age.[52] As Barbara L. Bellows has noted in her study of this Charleston institution, the founders were concerned not only with protecting certain poor white children in their vulnerable, formative years but instilling upon them a sense of racial separateness and superiority as well.[53]

With at least part of its funding guaranteed by tax revenue, the managers were not as dependent on income generated from charity sermons and other popular events, yet they held them all the same. Upon the sixth anniversary of its founding, the Reverend Dr. George Buist delivered an address in which he praised the "charitable men" whose generous patronage had improved the condition of many wretched children. "By this

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Apprenticeship," *The Journal of Economic History* 62 (June 2002), 356-382 and John. E. Murray, "Fates of Orphans: Poor Children in Antebellum Charleston," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 33 (Spring, 2003), 519-45.

[50] Quoted in Bellows, *Benevolence Among Slaveholders*, 121.

[51] See Anne E. C. McCants, *Civic Charity in a Golden Age: Orphan Care in Early Modern Amsterdam* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997). The orphan house began as a Catholic lay charity in 1528, and in 1578 it was taken over by Protestant municipal officials. During the seventeenth and eighteenth century, two houses were in operation: one for the children of citizens and another for the children non-citizens, which was lesser in many respects.

[52] Murray and Herndon, "Markets for Children in Early America," 357.

[53] "The two thousand white children who passed through the asylum's doors from 1790 to 1860 not only had their basic needs met but also learned about their role in a biracial society." Bellows, *Benevolence Among Slaveholders*, 122.

public mode of education," he said, "you form a host of patriots and warriors, who know no parent but their country, and owe no debt of gratitude but the advancement of the general weal." He made clear that the benefactors were not merely helping the lone child—they were fortifying the nation. "I have no doubt every skilful politician will agree with me in thinking, that this house, appropriated as it is, to the maintenance and education of orphan boys and girls, is a more effectual defence of the state, than the bulwarks and loud-toned instruments of destruction which formerly rested on the same foundation."[54] The inhabitants of Charleston had struggled to fend off British invasion during the Revolution, but the enemy that now threatened the United States of America was an invisible one. Ignorance and dissipation would devour poor children and lead to the eventual ruin of the republic unless benevolent men thwarted the attack. Dr. Buist reassures the men that their support of the poor and orphaned addressed the highest need of the city and state adding that "*Many of the fair daughters of Charity have done virtuously but this excelleth them all*."[55] Charity was traditionally personified as a woman, a symbolic association that Reverend Buist himself intimates by calling the Charleston orphan house a "fair daughter," though he does not go so far as to evoke the standard iconographic image of a mother suckling her infants.[56] According to Dr. Buist, tending poor and orphaned children constituted a national imperative—the "defence of

[54] George Buist, *An Oration, Delivered at the Orphan-House in Charleston, on the Sixth Anniversary of the Institution* (Charleston: Markland & M'Iver, 1795), 10.
[55] Buist, *Oration*, 7.
[56] Two examples of such images are Andrea del Sarto's 1518 painting Charity and Johann Zoffany's 1769 *Caritas Romana*, which depicts a Roman matron nursing her sickly, imprisoned father. Hazel Mills, "'La Charité est une Mère': Catholic Women and Poor Relief in France, 1690-1850" in Hugh Cunningham and Joanna Innes, eds., *Charity, Philanthropy and Reform, from the 1690s to 1850* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998). William R. Levin, "The Iconography of *Charity* Redux: The Origins of Two Little-Known Symbols for Amor Proximi in Fifteenth-Century Italian art," *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 20 (1993), 119-99.

the state," to be precise, but in the way that Bethesda failed to yield offspring, the Charleston Orphan House also proved barren. As best as can be determined, no other community immediately followed its example.

At least four orphanages were founded in the eighteenth century, yet they failed to excite other communities to do the same. That the Ursulines in New Orleans were summarily ignored by Anglo-Americans is understandable. The Protestant majority in colonial America would have held a convent of celibate females to be thoroughly repugnant, one of the many perversions that Catholicism had wreaked upon Christianity. On the other hand, the Protestants who experimented with residential care in America during the eighteenth century were men— married men in the case of Whitefield and the commissioners of the Charleston Orphan House. Though women were employed as matrons to the children, they were not among the founders or managers of these early establishments. Put simply, residential relief in British America during the colonial and Revolutionary era mirrored the patriarchal hierarchy of colonial households. Furthermore, its proponents aimed to assist not only children who were homeless but also those with parents who could not care for them or whose care might prove dangerous to the child's moral condition.

As discussed in previous chapters, mothers gradually ascended to a position of domestic authority during the early republic and increasingly assumed responsible for the moral and religious upbringing of their sons and daughters.[57] Childrearing became seen

[57] According to Phillip N. Mulder, "Mothers played a crucial role in the education of their children, from catechizing to setting pious examples." Indeed, religious instruction was seen to begin in the home with the assistance of primers such as "A Mother's Catechism." *A Controversial Spirit: Evangelical Awakenings in the South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 22-23. Ruth H. Bloch discusses the rising

by many thinkers as an important part of nation-building, for the success of the new country depended on the virtue of future citizens. Linda Kerber has characterized this phenomenon as "Republican Motherhood," a way for women to participate in the political experiment of the United States while remaining fixed in their traditional sphere.[58] At the end of the eighteenth century, however, women began to direct these same impulses outside the private home and into the community: young Quaker women in Philadelphia formed schools to educate poor children—white and black—and ladies in New York organized a society to relieve distressed widows and their children.[59] And in 1800, a group of Boston women founded a residence for poor and orphaned girls, the first such establishment since the creation of the Charleston Orphan House. The Boston Female Asylum was the first of many juvenile residences launched and managed entirely by women.[60] In the first fifteen years of the nineteenth century, others appeared in Savannah, Georgia; Portsmouth (New Hampshire), Salem, Massachusetts; Petersburg,

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conception of mothers as the domestic source of morality in the early republic in "American Feminine Ideals in Transition: The Rise of the Moral Mother, 1875-1815," in *Gender and Morality in Anglo-American Culture, 1650-1800* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). See also Nancy Cott on "Domesticity" in *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), chap. 2.

[58] Focusing on political influences in shaping views of women, Linda K. Kerber explores the growing trend at the turn of the nineteenth century of educating women to prepare them as mothers who were responsible for educating their young children; *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press,1980; New York: W.W. Norton, 1986), chap. 7, esp. 210-13, 228-31.

[59] On the work of benevolent Quaker women, see Margaret Morris Haviland, "Beyond Women's Sphere: Young Quaker Women and the Veil of Charity in Philadelphia, 1790-1810" *The William and Mary Quarterly* 51 (July 1994): 419-46. The other organization referred to here is the Society for the Relief of Widows with Small Children, founded New York in 1797, which is discussed in chapter 1.

[60] See Susan Lynne Porter, *The Benevolent Asylum—Image and Reality: The Care and Training of Female Orphans in Boston, 1800-1840* (PhD diss., Boston University, 1984). See also Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002). Citing Homer Folks, Thomas A. Hacsi lists a 1799 orphan asylum as the earliest founded by women, which does not seem to be the case. The Baltimore Female Humane Association, founded in 1800, targeted a charity school rather than an asylum. Baltimore Female Humane Association, *A Plan of the Female Humane Association Charity School*...(Baltimore?: Warner & Hanna?, 1800).

Virginia; Fayetteville, North Carolina; New York, New York; and the District of Columbia among other locations of the Eastern Seaboard. No comparable institutions appear to have been founded by municipal governments or male voluntary societies at this time.

As women assumed greater responsibility over their children, by the turn of the nineteenth century they also cultivated authority over the community's poor and orphaned children, especially those of their own sex. Though charitable associations drew these women away from the confines of the home and into the public realm, the nature of the work corresponded with conventional notions of female domesticity. As Ruth Bloch has eloquently observed, "other respectable female roles—wife, charity worker, teacher, sentimental writer—were in large part cultural defined as extensions of motherhood, all similarly regarded as nurturant, empathic, and morally directive."[61] While the concept of "Republican Motherhood" captures the private domestic role that emerged so prominently during the early republic, it does adequately account for the increasingly public extension of maternal activity. The term "civic motherhood" more precisely reflects the work of female charitable associations with respect to young indigent minors. Indeed, association members need not be mothers at all (many were unmarried or otherwise childless) to assume the role of "civic mother," in the way that "city fathers" were not necessarily fathers themselves. The civic mother had no official capacity and, as an individual, very few legal rights, but the moral authority garnered

[61] Bloch, "American Feminine Ideals in Transition: The Rise of the Moral Mother, 1875-1815," 58.

over the domestic sphere in the wake of the Revolution transcended into the public realm of child welfare, primarily under the auspices of collective action.

Anglo-American society of the colonial and early national period rejected the Ursuline model of juvenile relief but never fully embraced the Bethesda or Charleston models either. Instead, the notion of gathering poor children inside a central residence seems to have struck a chord in the United States when domestic motherhood gained ascendance. As civic motherhood took root in communities around the country, benevolent women became regarded as better suited than male officials in ensuring the moral and religious integrity of young minors and in affording them corporeal protection—and that the rearing of poor and orphaned children was best conducted within a household managed by women. Just as benevolent men were the patriarchs of the juvenile institutions they founded in British America, benevolent women became the matriarchs of the establishments they created during the early republic, and this shift was also manifested by a change of name. Contrary to the examples in Saxony, Georgia, and South Carolina, orphan residences were no longer called a "house" but an "asylum," a word that connoted far greater urgency and the sense that children were in terrible jeopardy.

Plagues and Predators

> Of all the plagues I ever heard of, we have one that exceeds them. The yellow fever has raged so in this place, that three fourths, or at least two thirds of the inhabitants have left the place, and there are not enough to tend the sick and bury the dead. The poor wretches are found dead in their houses by themselves, and it is difficult to get any one to lay them out and put them into the ground. Almost all the stores are shut up, and the post-

> office is only open two or three hours on mail days. It is such an awful time that not a dollar enters the town, except to get some necessary that cannot be dispensed with.[62]

Natchez had long been notorious for its summer "seasonings," when extreme heat and humidity weakened bodies and made them susceptible to many forms of contagious diseases.[63] Reverend Daniel Smith left for a short New England sojourn in the late spring of 1816, in part to avoid being in the Lower Mississippi Valley during the warmest months. He pledged to return by the early fall, a plan deemed prudent by the locals.[64] But then no one thought that autumn could prove even more dangerous. As unpleasant and unhealthful as summer seasonings could be, nothing compared to September through November 1817, when the first of many yellow fever epidemics ravaged the region.[65] Cases of the ghastly illness—distinct for the sallow skin and black vomit suffered by its victims—were not unknown to the region, but never before had yellow fever gripped so many inhabitants, as it had in Philadelphia, New York, and other coastal cities in the United States.[66] In Louisiana and Mississippi, it became known as "Stranger's Fever" or

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[62] From a letter dated October 13, 1817 by an unnamed writer printed in *The American Monthly Magazine and Critical Review* 2 (December 1817):140.

[63] After visiting Natchez, Francois Michaux reported that "the inhabitants are every year exposed to intermittent fevers during the summer and autumn." *Travels to the Westward of the Allegheny Mountains, in the States of Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee, in the year 1802* in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846*, vol. 3 (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1904), 254. Fortescue Cuming wrote that the upper town's proximity to "noxious vapours" emerging from the river bank subjected inhabitants "to fevers and agues, especially from July to October inclusive, when few strangers escape a seasoning, as it is called, which frequently proves mortal." *Sketches of a Tour to the Western Country…through Louisiana*, reprinted in Ibid., 321.

[64] "It occasioned much regret that I was obliged to leave them destitute of preaching this summer. But as I could not dispense with visiting the Northern States during this year, they agreed with me in opinion, that I had best come away immediately; and thus avoid the warm season, and be ready to return early in the fall." From a letter by Daniel Smith, written from Philadelphia and dated June 9, 1816; printed in *Religious Remembrancer* 51 (August 16, 1817): 201.

[65] James, *Antebellum Natchez*, 85-86.

[66] One of the best accounts of the yellow fever epidemics in Natchez during the autumns of 1817 and 1819 is A. Perlee, "An Account of the Yellow Fever in Natchez," *The Philadelphia Journal of the Medical and*

"Stranger's Disease," a characterization revealing the complete unawareness that mosquitoes rather than foreign boatmen were the carriers.[67] This mysterious disease struck Natchez so viciously in 1817 that the city nearly emptied of its inhabitants, as noted in the account above, written by a survivor of the epidemic. Poor families were removed from city and "hutted" at public expense, but rich or destitute, no group was absolutely impervious to the disease. However, in a curious twist of nature, the "fairer sex" seemed particularly resilient.[68] As a physician later described of that autumn: "Whites, mulattoes, negroes, Indians, indigenes, old residents, and strangers were all sufferers. Children and adults were equally obnoxious to it. The only considerable difference was, that there were fewer females than males attacked."[69]

The accuracy of this observation is impossible to determine, but among the seventy or so women who subscribed to the Female Charitable Society, only one is known to have died during the epidemic: the President (later First Directress), Margaret

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Physical Sciences 3 (1821): 1-17. He also gives an extremely detailed description of the disease's symptoms and various methods of treatment. For more on yellow fever in the Lower Mississippi Valley during the early republic, see Jo Ann Carrigan, *The Saffron Scourge: A History of Yellow Fever in Louisiana, 1796-1905* (Lafayette: University of Southwestern Louisiana Press, 1994) and Margaret Humphreys, *Yellow Fever and the South* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992). Surprisingly, there has not been a single comprehensive examination of yellow fever epidemics throughout the United States. Apart from the aforementioned regional studies of the South, Philadelphia—specifically, the yellow fever epidemic of 1793—receives the most attention. J.H. Powell, *Bring Out Your Dead: The Great Plague of Yellow Fever in Philadelphia in 1793* (1949; repr., Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993) remains a chilling classic. See also Martin S. Pernick, "Politics, Parties, and Pestilence: Epidemic Yellow Fever in Philadelphia and the Rise of the First Party System," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 29 (October 1972): 559-86.

[67] Jo Ann Carrigan, "Privilege, Prejudice, and the Strangers' Disease in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans," *The Journal of Southern History* 36 (November 1970): 568-78.

[68] Perlee describes the 1817 epidemic based on second-hand accounts. "An Account of the Yellow Fever in Natchez," 4-5,

[69] Perlee also noted that inhabitants of French and Spanish origin seemed more resistant to the fever, which he "imputed to their peculiar mode of living." Ibid., 10.

Kempe.[70] Though spared the majority of its members, the Society was nonetheless disrupted. Even with the Lancastrian Academy to inspect, clothes to fashion for the charity children, and innumerable other duties to carry out, meetings became "illy attended." The officers gathered on September 20, 1817 for special business and resolved to convene again the following Saturday, but another meeting would not occur until January 26, 1818. A frost early in November had finally ruptured the fever's hold on the region, and Natchezians gradually returned to their homes. Because an estimated three hundred persons—about one-tenth the city's population—were reported dead, returning to normalcy took considerable time.[71]

As the members of the Female Charitable Society resumed their work, they also reflected on the tragedy from an organizational standpoint. One member even requested that the officers investigate "her treatment of one of the Charity Children during the Yellow Fever which but recently ravaged our City." Specifically, the concern seemed to be "the propriety of their being taken from her." After looking into the matter, the governing board determined that "their removal was injudicious."[72] The neuter pronoun and lack of name makes it impossible to positively identify the child, but the next minutebook entry, dating in June, includes a reference to Washington White, the boy who had been "adopted" by Mrs. Pearse. The officers resolved to ascertain "by what authority

[70] "A report of the proceedings for the annual meeting in 1818 did not make its way to the public from a variety of difficulties," explained the Society at the 1819 annual meeting; "among which the Managers most feelingly enumerate the sickness and death of their worthy and lamented 1st Directress _____." April 5, 1819, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[71] Perlee, "An Account of the Yellow Fever in Natchez," 5.
[72] January 26, 1818, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.

he was removed from the protection of the 'Society.'"[73] From these cryptic references, it seems that in addition to the ravages of disease, the ladies struggled with questions of jurisdiction: Who held ultimate authority over the charity children? If the Society had designated certain boys and girls as under their protection, could that claim be suspended by another body during periods of extreme crisis?

Pages appear to have been lost from the minutebook, and so the work of the Female Charitable Society during 1818 is very unclear. However, an act of incorporation by the Mississippi legislature, dating February 20, 1819, shows that the officers were striving toward institutional continuity.[74] Most female associations in the early republic sought to form a "body politic," so members could come and go while leaving the organization intact. Perhaps more importantly, this legislation allowed benevolent women to engage collectedly in transactions, such as the sale and purchase of real estate, often legally denied them as individuals.[75] Signed by the governor, the act of incorporation also gave the Society greater legitimacy as well as permanency, but at the annual meeting of 1819, held less than one month later, the officers announced that they were seeking a more concrete establishment. "It will be perceived, by a purchase of Bank Stock, as stated in the foregoing account," reads the report, "that the Society are anxious to accumulate a steady and permanent fund, with a view to the establishment

[73] Ibid., June 1, 1818.
[74] The act o incorporate "The Female Charitable Society of Natchez" was passed on February 17, 1819. *Acts Passed at the First Session of the Second General Assembly of the State of Mississippi* (Natchez: Marschalk and Evens, 1819), 102-104.
[75] Ibid. For more on the incorporation of female societies, see Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 49-53 and Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: Norton, 1985), 200-201. On the controversy of incorporation in antebellum United States, see Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 272, fn 14.

(according to the wishes of some of their members) of an Orphan Asylum."[76] The order for bank stock had been made in July 1817, but nothing had been said of its intended purpose or the fact that they were changing course from their initial mission of running a charity school.[77] Then, Society officers had been wrangling with county officials for financial assistance, but no mention was made of plans to undertake the construction of a residential institution for the charity children.

Long before it accumulated the vile patina it carries today with respect to institutions, the word "asylum" signified a sanctuary, a safe harbor in a dangerous world. To the Salzburgers and other refugees of religious persecution America was an asylum, and this characterization became amplified during the Revolution through the earnest rhetoric of Thomas Paine and other patriotic luminaries.[78] With independence attained, among the emerging imperatives of the new nation was the care and rearing of children. No longer viewed as innately corrupt beings, young boys and girls became regarded as Edenic beings, innocent of sin and perfectly receptive to grace. However, like the first residents of Paradise, children could also be swayed toward evil.

The use of the term "asylum" over the medieval "hospital" or more recent "orphan house" appears as early as 1758 with the Asylum for Orphan Girls in London. This institution had been established with the assistance of Sir John Fielding, who as magistrate doubtless faced numerous cases of young females in need of parish relief but lacking proper settlement. There must have been many boys in the same predicament,

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[76] April 5, 1819, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[77] Ibid., July 12, 1817.
[78] See Marilyn C. Baseler, '*Asylum for Mankind': America, 1607-1800* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

but the organizers of the institution forwarded poor girls as having "double claim of the humane and virtuous, from being not only exposed to the miseries of want and idleness, but, as they grow up, to the solicitations of the vicious, and to all the dreadful consequences of an early seduction."[79]

Evidently, American women perceived the same threat with respect to prepubescent girls, for "female asylums" proliferated in the United States. Compared to the blandness of the term "house," this new characterization conveyed the anxiety and apprehension toward young females that had grown over the past decades, in particular their vulnerability to sexual predation, which resulted in all manner of social ills.[80] As

[79] *An Abstract from the Account of the Asylum, or House of Refuge…for the Reception of Friendless and Deserted Orphan Girls, The Settlement of Whose Parents Cannot Be Found*, 1758. Around the same time, it became increasingly common for ladies to organize societies devoted to charity. In 1789, for example, a group of women in Hull founded the Benevolent Female Society, one of many organized for the mutual assistance of members. The society was governed on a rotational basis by four "Stewardesses" promoted from the membership; *Articles to Be Observed and Kept by All the Members of the Benevolent Female Society, Begun December, 7th, 1789* (Hull: J. Farraby, 1789). Vickery lists several mutual aid and charitable societies formed in northern England at the turn of the nineteenth century; *The Gentleman's Daughter*, 256 fn75. Many others were formed late in the century for the assistance of the poor, as feudalistic *noblesse oblige* gave way to a conception of charity as a testament to moral refinement. In contrast to the plethora of studies regarding women's societies in the early American republic, relatively few historians have examined the formation of societies among English ladies and gentlewomen beginning in the latter third of the eighteenth century. Amanda Vickery briefly addresses this subject and notes that women formed for a variety of interests, including intellectual, literary, as well as benevolent associations; *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 254-258. According to Vickery, in Georgian England "the proper public expression of a gentlewoman's religious energy was the charitable association," 254. Such became the case in early republic America. Michael J. D. Roberts writes that in late eighteenth-century England, "educated citizens came to accept the view that charity was not a duty performed as a result of holding resources on trust for communal benefit: it was an act of mercy performed as a result of morally refined sensitivity in the giver to the sight or knowledge of human suffering." "Hand versus Heart? Voluntary Associations and Charity Organization in England, c. 1700-1850" in Hugh Cunningham and Joanna Innes, eds., *Charity, Philanthropy and Reform, from the 1690s to 1850* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 70.

[80] Clare A. Lyons shows how prostitution and nonmarital sexual relations were commonly tolerated during the colonial era, but that after the Revolution these behaviors became the target of societal reform. *Sex Among the Rabble: An Intimate History of Gender and Power in the Age of Revolution, Philadelphia, 1730-1830* (Chapel Hill:The University of North Carolina Press, 2006). On the sexual vulnerability of and perceptions of "looseness" among working class females, see also Sharon Block, *Rape and Sexual Power in Early America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006) and Kathleen M. Brown,

literary scholars of this era have shown, novels depicting horrors that befell seduced women—from *Clarissa* to *Charlotte Temple* to *The Coquette*—were voraciously consumed by American readers, especially those who were female.[81] Whether incidents of sexual assault upon poor females truly abounded in the aforementioned cities is a topic that begs further study, but between literary productions and contemporary developments in child welfare the message seems clear: girls were considered to be in danger, and women regarded themselves as peculiarly suited to afford them protection.

Early in 1817, before the yellow fever epidemic, a group of Anglo-American women in New Orleans founded the Female Orphan Asylum for the protection of young girls, whom they deemed especially vulnerable and susceptible to worldly perils. The asylum was named for its principal benefactor, planter and statesman Julien Poydras, whose donation of property made the establishment possible in the first place and whose annual gifts comprised the principal income for a number of years.[82] His money, however, did not lead him to interfere with the asylum's daily operations; indeed its management seems to have remained firmly in the hands of the lady officers. Like the Natchez Female Charitable Society, benevolent women in New Orleans faced difficulties

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Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

[81] See in particular, Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*, exp. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). So popular were these novels, it was not uncommon for girls to be named after fictional heroines. The name "Clarissa" became common among women in Britain and America during the eighteenth century. In fact, "Clarissa" was the middle name of Maria Vidal Davis, the woman hosted the first meeting of the Natchez Female Charitable Society. Linda K. Kerber discusses the rising fear at the turn of the nineteenth century that, as creatures of the heart, women were especially susceptible to emulating behaviors depicted in novels, which increasingly seemed to focus on tales of seduction. *Women of the Republic*, 239-41, 245-46. See also Elizabeth Barnes, *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), chap. 3.

[82] Julien Poydras is mentioned repeatedly from the asylum's founding in 1817 until his death in 1824. Minutebook I (January 1817 to January 1823) and Minutebook II (January 1823 to May 1832), Poydras Home Collection, HTML.

with respect to jurisdiction over their children in their care, but eventually the law settled on their side. As officers reminded the public in their 1819 annual report, some time in the preceding year the Louisiana legislature enacted a statute forbidding the removal of a child without the consent of the directresses or compensation for the maintenance they had provided.[83] While the Ursulines were still caring for orphans as they had done for nearly a hundred years, in 1824 all the nuns' charges were ordered transferred to the new facility by the New Orleans city council, which had become increasingly impatient with the order of celibate religious females. The councilmen also wished to demonstrate that girls were better off with ladies who were Protestant and mothers themselves.[84]

The peculiar dangers faced by young females may have also led the Female Charitable Society to follow the example of benevolent women in New Orleans and elsewhere and seek the establishment of an asylum in Natchez. Though incomplete, the criminal court records of Adams County contain several cases illustrative of hazards faced by girls from poor and laboring families in Mississippi during the nineteenth century. In 1818, for example, a brickmaker named John Forsyth was charged with assault and battery against John Ellis, who was apparently one of his laborers, perhaps a former apprentice.[85] The only surviving documents for *State of Mississippi v. John Forsyth* is a deposition from James Hargrove, a witness to the event whose relation to either the accused or the defendant is not mentioned. One evening at Mr. Forsyth's residence, Hargrove observed Ellis lying on his cot under the shed when the man

[83] January 16, 1819, Minutebook I (January 1817 to January 1823), Poydras Home Collection, HTML.
[84] Emily Clark discusses the Poydras Asylum at length in *Masterless Mistresses*, chap. 7.
[85] *State of Mississippi v. John Forsyth*, 1818, box 40, file 30, HNF.

suddenly called out to Maria Forsyth "the little daughter of Mr. F." When she approached Ellis, according to the witness, "he ran his hand up under her clothes, and used the child in a way wholly unbecoming; the child resisted but after some time was coaxed to lie down on the cot." Ellis then draped his handkerchief over their heads. For some reason, Hargrove did not inform the girl's parents but instead told the story to a third party, who then informed Mrs. Forsyth. Afterward, she "was seen in considerable distress," and when her husband came home and learned from her what had happened, "Mr. Forsyth attacked Ellis who denied having done so, but F. expressed his belief that he was guilty and took up a stick of tolerable size and struck Ellis several times (say 3 or 4)."[86]

The last bit of information supplied by the deponent was Maria Forsyth's age, which Hargrove supposed to be about ten years.[87] Maria's age was material to the case, for the involvement of infants—those below the age of twenty-one—almost always altered the way particular charges were viewed. In the legal handbook given to Mississippi magistrates, some instances of "battery" were considered justifiable, such as when "a parent or master, gives moderate correction to his child, his scholar, or his apprentice."[88] Both self-defense and the protection of property were other instances in which laying hands upon another could be deemed appropriate.[89] While rape was a separate and clearly defined crime, sexual molestation without "carnal knowledge" was not. It is possible that the local justices were unaware of the reasons behind Forsyth's

[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid. It appears that the words "or so old" were inserted later after "ten years old." Sworn August 7, 1818.
[88] Harry Toulmin, *The Magistrate's Assistant* (Natchez: Samuel Terrell, 1807), 29.
[89] Ibid., 29-30.

outburst before bringing charges against him. And if the case went to trial, the jury may have found the defendant "not guilty" by broadly interpreting the allowances for battery.

"Strangers" in the household always posed a threat, but sometimes the parents themselves contributed to their children's endangerment. Another case from 1818 shows the state taking a more active role in pursuing an individual accused of a sexual crime against a young female. In October of that year, Elizabeth Zane complained to the justice of the peace of Adams County, and in her deposition, Mrs. Zane declared that Thompson had committed "a violent assault and battery on Laura (abt. 3 years of Age) the infant daughter of said Elizabeth and did then and there commit a rape upon the said Laura." The county constable was ordered to apprehend the accused, and witnesses were summoned to give their testimonies on behalf of the prosecution in *State of Mississippi v. Jacob R. Thompson*.[90]

For some reason, the memorandum of testimony, taken by the presiding justice of the peace, presents a distinctly different charge from the one on Thompson's arrest warrant. In the deposition, the defendant was deemed to have "assaulted Laura, infant child…with intent to commit a rape." The word "intent" could mean the difference between life and death for the accused. When pursued to conviction, an assault against any person could lead to a fine, imprisonment, or "ignominious corporal penalties." Rape, on the other hand, was a capital offense.[91] Ordinarily, witnesses had to be above age fourteen to be considered competent, but the testimony of rape victims below the

[90] All quotations from and details pertaining to this case come the Memorandum of Testimony dated October 14, 1818 from *State of Mississippi v. Jacob R. Thompson*, box 43, file 63, HNF.
[91] Toulmin, *Magistrate's Assistant*. 30, 172.

"age of discretion" was admissible as evidence.[92] The memorandum outlines the circumstances of the case, which is full of disturbing and perplexing details, not simply about Thompson's alleged crime but also the responses of the girl's own mother.

Elizabeth Zane's husband lived away, and like many women in Natchez who needed to make ends meet, she took in boarders. Jacob Thompson lodged upstairs, and one Wednesday he came home early, saying that he felt unwell, and Laura followed him as he retired to his room. When Mrs. Zane heard the girl "romping and making a noise," she was afraid that she was disturbing her lodger so she called out to her daughter. At the same time, she felt "a little uneasy" about the situation, for every now and then Laura yelled "quit!" Mrs. Zane called out again, and the girl responded that "Mr. Thompson said there was a bear on the steps." Obviously afraid, Laura refused to descend unless the lodger met her at the head of the stairs, yet somehow Mrs. Zane convinced her daughter to come down alone. It was then she noticed that her daughter was holding a dollar bill. When asked about the money, Laura replied that "Mr. Thompson gave it to her saying that she was 'his little wife.'" Apparently reluctant to incommode her boarder—a valuable source of income—Mrs. Zane sent the girl back upstairs to return it. A man named Peter Baker, whose relation to the Zanes is unclear, was present in the house when this incident occurred, and he confirmed Mrs. Zane's account.[93]

The following Monday, Laura began to complain that she felt very sore. Assuming that the girl was merely "chafed," Mrs. Zane looked no further into the matter.

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[92] Ibid., 33, 172.

[93] All these events were confirmed by another witness, Peter Baker, perhaps another boarder at the Zane household.

However, the child continued to complain while they were out and about the next day, and her mother observed that "she could barely walk." When her sister expressed alarm over the girl's condition, they returned home from their visit, and for the first time Mrs. Zane asked her daughter if she knew why she was in pain. Laura "readily replied that on the day she was upstairs—when Mr. Thompson gave her the dollar—he hurt her with his Peter on her Polly." Then without any prompting, the girl added, "an't he bad man."

Elizabeth Zane confronted Mr. Thompson about what Laura had told her, and he immediately protested his innocence: "My God—What Madam! I never hurt her." It was not until the next day that Mrs. Zane called for a doctor, who then reported to the justice of the peace that he "examined the child this morning and found it to be infected with a confirmed clap of recent appearance but no laceration of the parts." The doctor examined Thompson as well but found no evidence of a similar infection.[94]

A three-year-old girl had contracted a venereal disease, but nowhere in the testimony is there a suggestion that she was at fault. From a legal perspective, Laura Zane was indeed blameless on account of her age. According to the manual issued to justices of the peace in Mississippi, infants below fourteen years of age were given great leniency for committing offenses because they were considered "incapable of guile" unless the child clearly demonstrated "a capacity to discern between good and evil." For instance, if one child murdered another and then hid himself or the body, the court could take that concealment as an indication of moral awareness. However, infants under seven

[94] "Have also examined Jacob R. Thompson and find no appearance of dunder on him." The term "dunder" casts some confusion onto the doctor's assessment. Literally, it refers to the dregs of cane-juice used in the fermentation of rum, but figuratively it might have been used to describe a symptom of gonorrhea. Whether the term refers to a state of drunkenness or a physical condition, Mr. Thompson apparently demonstrated neither.

seem to have been regarded as mentally incapable of making distinctions between right and wrong.[95] Developing gonorrhea was not a crime per se, but if Laura had been older, say at or near her majority, the justices may have investigated the matter a bit more thoroughly before charging Jacob Thompson with assault. Laura's actions matched what the law expected at her age. She made no attempt to hide her condition and when asked about it, she "readily" told her story. An older female who contracted such a disease would probably hesitate for the shame and reproach she would bring on herself.

Because of her tender age, Laura's capacity for judgment was regarded as unsound, though the same might have been said about her mother. The documents do not make clear the outcome of the case, but it was probably dismissed, as the next month Mrs. Zane refused to lend any further assistance. "I wish to have no further trouble about it," she stated in a letter to the justice of the peace, adding that she had "no objections to have Thompson reliesed." Though slow to realize her daughter's condition, Elizabeth Zane initially seemed committed to pursuing the man who had caused it, then dropped the charge altogether. Thompson had been arrested and taken into custody, but without the testimony of his accuser, he was likely set free.

The cases involving Mary Forsythe and Laura Zane capture the peril that young children, females in particular, faced even when they had a parent looking after them. With respect to Mary, John Ellis seemed to make his seduction a game, as if he were just another child "hiding" with her under the cover of a handkerchief. If Laura's account

[95] "Under seven years, an infant cannot be guilty of felony: but at eight years old he may, if capable of guile. Under fourteen he shall be deemed incapable of guile, until it appear that he was capable, and could discern between good and evil; and then he may be convicted, and suffer death…But in all such cases, the evidence of malice, which is to supply age, or of a capacity to discern between good and evil, should be strong and clear beyond all doubt or contradiction." Toulmin, *Magistrate's Assistant*, 155-56.

was true, then the lack of parental intervention exposed the girl to the predations of her mother's lodger, who seemed to know just how to lure her into his bed. Indeed, Thompson made his crime an act of play: they were "playing house," and she was his little wife; if she tried to go downstairs, a bear would meet her—and probably eat her—on the steps; afterward, she was given money, perhaps in exchange for the promise to tell no one. The fear among citizens like the members of the Natchez Female Charitable Society was that these encounters might plunge Mary, Laura, and other young girls into sexual immorality as adults, perhaps even prostitution.[96]

Delicacy precluded any official discussion of such sordid happenings, though it is probable that some in the Female Charitable Society knew of the episode. For one thing, the presiding justice of the peace in the Laura Zane case was Andrew Marschalk, an overseer of the poor whose wife was also a Society member.[97] Marschalk himself was an ally of the ladies' benevolent work, as he frequently made printings for them and ran their advertisements in his newspaper. And, of course, the compactness of Natchez rendered any event occurring within the city limits susceptible to gossip. From Laura to Elizabeth Zane to her sister to the doctor to the additional witnesses, there were ample opportunities for the story to emerge. Considering that only a couple of months earlier young Maria

[96] Tales of seduction, both true and fictional, often resulted in the female victim descending into prostitution, a fate all too possible among poor women, who suffered from limited economic choices. Lyons, *Sex Among the Rabble*, 312-22.

[97] Daniel C. Vogt lists Andrew Marschalk among the overseers of the poor in Adams County from 1818 to 1821 "Poor Relief in Frontier Mississippi, 1798-1832," *Journal of Mississippi History* 51 (1989): 195. Though absent from the list of initial subscribers to the Female Charitable Society, Mrs. Marschalk was elected as a manager at the 1821 annual meeting. May 7, 1821, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.

Forsyth had also been molested, the condition of young females must have appeared precarious indeed.

The current disarray of criminal court records makes it difficult to precisely quantify the incidents of sexual assault on girls in Adams County during the early nineteenth century. These cases provide a glimpse of what was occurring around Natchez the time the Female Charitable Society began pushing for an orphan asylum. Of course, there was nothing new about female children falling prey to older men, or the inability of female children to discern impropriety or potential danger. In 1795, the Spanish governor of Natchez dealt with a case involving a young girl who contended that her tutor "never made use of any unbecoming behavior to hur." The fact that he had "tickled hur side after she had said a lesson" did not seem amiss to child, or the fact that he had "slipped his hand into hur pocket."[98] The cases of 1818 likewise raise questions about the vigilance of adults in protecting young females from sexual predators. In the case of Maria Forsythe, for example, James Hargrove seems to have observed John Ellis enticing the girl onto his cot—why did he not intervene? Why did Hargrove act only afterward and then inform someone other than the girl's parents? What about Peter Baker, the man who was in the house the day Laura Zane was purportedly assaulted? Baker heard the girl say that Jacob Thompson had called her "his little wife" and could have gone upstairs himself.

In the early nineteenth century, the sexual innocence of a young female was considered her most precious asset, and the loss of it could ruin her future prospects.

[98] In a letter of testimony from Thomas M. Green to Governor Gayoso, dated April 7, 1795, Provincial and Territorial Documents, 1759-1813, NTC.

Even the implication of wantonness could spell her doom. Thirteen-year-old Melissa Ailes sought damages from a man who publicly accused her of being "as great a whore as ever lived."[99] Not only did the man openly accuse the girl of "fornication," an assertion which he also published, he avowed that she was "with child" and that the father of the bastard was a "negroe." In one of the documents pertaining to this slander and libel suit which commenced in 1821, the alleged paramour seems to have been a free person of color rather than a slave. Fornication was bad enough, but to charge a white girl of consorting with a black man of any status was considered far worse. While sexual encounters between white men and black women—especially those who were enslaved—were tolerated in Natchez, for a white female to promiscuously cross the color line defiled all of Southern womanhood.[100] And the price for such a violation was high—twenty thousand dollars in damages is what Melissa sought from the man who had brought her "into public scandal infamy and disgrace" and injured her "beyond immediate restoration."[101] The suit dragged on for several years and was finally dismissed in 1823. Before then, one witness had attested that Melissa was "a good pious chaste virtuous and honest citizen and hath always for all her lifetime past hitherto behaved and governed herself." Whether such words were able to repair her damaged character is unknown, but the enormous sum Melissa desired in compensation suggests

[99] *Melissa Ailes v. Peter Southworth*, 1822-23, box 128, file 114, HNF.
[100] Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 209-10. Diane Miller Sommerville argues that sexual relations between white women were condemned in the antebellum South, but that the "looseness" of the white female was regarded a factor as much as, if not more than, the rapaciousness of the black male. "The Rape Myth in the Old South Reconsidered," *The Journal of Southern History* 61 (August 1995): 481-518. See also Peter W. Bardaglio, *Reconstructing the Household: Families, Sex, and the Law in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).
[101] *Melissa Ailes v. Peter Southworth*, 1822-23, Drawer 114, Box 128, HNF.

that did not expect to be fully acquitted by the public even if a jury found her accuser guilty of malicious lies.

When the suit commenced, it seems that Melissa Ailes was living in the care of an Adams County overseer of the poor, who acted as her "next friend." Melissa is frequently cited as "an orphan," and she may have at one time been under the protection of the Female Charitable Society.[102] A young boy of the same surname appears in a general list of children in the minutebook, and another boy by the name of Ailes is noted in the orphan's court records as an apprentice.[103] Unfortunately, incomplete records obscure the story of the Ailes children, but these few details reflect the haphazardness of dealing with destitute minors in early republic Natchez as well as the vulnerability of orphans. Perhaps Melissa was guilty of fornication, perhaps not. Doubtless her story was known throughout the community and merely highlighted the urgency for a sanctuary that could rear poor young children to virtue and fortify them with respectability.

The Natchez Female Charitable Society deviated from similar associations around the country in assisting boys as well as girls, and the reason may at least be partially ascribed to the apparent danger faced by prepubescent children regardless of gender. Young males were sometimes as defenseless as young females in the face of abusive adults, a fact that became apparent with apprentices. For example, in 1818 a complaint was made to the orphan's court "against Margaret Gibson alias Margaret Reed for ill

[102] Ibid.
[103] Edward Ailes was accepted by the Society on June 19, 1820, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR. In 1822 a "Manuel Ailes," age thirteen, was bound as an apprentice by the overseers of the poor to John Brutet, a tanner. Deed Record Book M, ACCC, 214.

treatment to Benjamin Phillips, said to be an apprentice by an Indenture."[104] Complaints were allowed by statute, and in practice the orphan's court placed the burden of proof on the mistress, not on the apprentice or the man who had reported the matter.[105] Perhaps the mistress could not refute the claim, for she admitted the charge. As a result, the justices nullified the indenture and another was drawn up, binding the boy to John Forsyth to learn "brickmaking." Forsyth received another apprentice during that same session when Rachel Williams accused John White of treating her son—his apprentice—in "an improper and an inhuman manner." The court agreed with her and revoked the indenture, then bound White to his new master.[106] The Perkins brothers, whose indentures were also revoked in 1819, were taken from one master and placed with another. Though the reason is not given, abuse and neglect are certainly possibilities.[107]

The orphan's court records reveal very few complaints from apprentices. However, some cases may have been handled by informal means in between sessions and others simply left unreported. Some complaints may have been altogether ignored. Under the law, apprentices could approach the court themselves, as John Blumon did in 1802 when he accused his master of "ill treatment." After postponing the case once, the court finally dismissed it altogether, deciding that the matter did "not come properly

[104] This case was handled during the April term of 1818. Orphan's Court Minutebook I (April 1803 to January 1815), ACCC, 158-59.
[105] P.L. Rainwater, "Sargent's Code," *The American Journal of Legal History* 11 (July 1967): 312-13.
[106] This case was also handled during the April term of 1818. Orphan's Court Minutebook I (April 1803 to January 1815), ACCC, 158-59.
[107] The Perkins brothers appeared during the July term of 1819. Adams County Orphan's Court Records, Minutebook II(February 1815 to January 1820), ACCC, 226.

before them."[108] However, at this early stage in territorial government, this court was the only body to hear the complaints that apprentices were entitled by law to make. Either the charge was found to be totally baseless or the justices did not wish to rule against someone as prominent as Winthrop Sargent, the former territorial governor and Blumon's master.[109]

Regardless of whether girls were more susceptible to physical abuse than boys, poor young children were uniformly vulnerable to misfortunes occasioned by unseen forces, such as disease and economic depression. Periodic downturns were not unknown to the Natchez region, but in 1819, financial panic swept the nation and hit especially hard those communities whose wealth was tied to the cotton market.[110] Compounding the agony of misfortune, Natchezians were hit by another yellow fever epidemic that same year. That 1818 had been dry and uneventful had "led to a dangerous security in the minds of the people," according to one observer, who noted that "hopes were entertained that such another calamity would not occur."[111] But occur it did. Yellow fever descended upon the Lower Mississippi Valley with great severity the same year as economic panic. Three thousand were reported dead in New Orleans, and Natchezians were not able to return to their homes until early December.[112] Many Society members fled, yet some remained in the city according to an account published in the local newspaper: "The children of parents swept off by yellow fever last autumn are many,

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[108] Mississippi Historical Records Survey, *Transcription of County Archives of Mississippi, No. 2 Adams County*, vol. 2 (Jackson: 1942), 18.
[109] Ibid.
[110] See N. Rothbard, *The Panic of 1819: Reactions and Policies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962).
[111] A. Perlee, "An Account of the Yellow Fever in Natchez," 7.
[112] *The American Medical Recorder* 3 (January 1820): 135.

and but for the active humanity and charity of the female society, who like ministering angels, flew to their relief, numbers must have perished in want and wretchedness."[113] A hospital had existed since Spanish rule, but it had fallen into disrepair and catered mostly to foreign boatmen; in others, it was a shelter wholly inappropriate for young orphans. During epidemics, there was probably little room for them anyway.[114] Besides, there were overseers of the poor and other county officials who could have (should have) come to the children's aid, it was the Female Charitable Society which ultimately gave sanctuary to the orphans of Natchez.

While the first public call for an orphan asylum was made back in spring of 1819, the plea grew more strident after the second yellow fever epidemic.[115] In requesting support for a juvenile residence at the annual meeting in March 1820, the Female Charitable Society demonstrated how their association had evolved over the past four years: "The object of this Society is to confer the benefit of moral and religious instruction, to arrest profligacy, cherish virtue, strengthen the feeble, as well as to bestow the tender guardianship of a parent on the bereaved orphan."[116] Teaching children piety and moral virtue was still a principal aim, but now the Society sought to act *in loco parentis* for the "bereaved orphan" as well as boys and girls whose parents could not or would not care for them.

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[113] *Mississippi Republican*, May 9, 1820.
[114] James points to an 1805 territorial act of incorporation which designated the old Spanish hospital for "the relief of indigent boatman, paupers of every description in this territory." *Antebellum Natchez*, 84-85. Death Records.
[115] Ibid.
[116] From the annual report, March 6, 1820, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.

In addition to the usual method of casting poor "orphans" as hopeless, as completely without recourse, the Society officers also stressed the economy of their plan. An asylum not only helped the orphan, it was "calculated to relieve the generous, and support the needy at a small expense"[117] In other words, residential institutions directly benefited affluent citizens by lowering the cost of assistance and thus functioning as a sort of "rich relief."

Benevolent women in Natchez were not the first to advance this line of reasoning. They may have taken a cue from the Female Charitable Society of New Orleans, who emphasized the cost benefit of their new enterprise: "The sum of two Dollars per quarter is little more than one bit per week, and to this little sum we confine our subscription; and trust that while it can scarcely be missed by the giver, it will prove a rich and lasting blessing to those on whom it is bestowed."[118] Given the stated intent to rear destitute female orphans to virtuous independence, the subscription must have seemed small in comparison to what property-holders contributed annually to the support of the local poor, but in New Orleans and Natchez, benevolent women seeking to establish residential juvenile care also argued that rearing children together was less expensive than placing them out in separate households. "To render our charity the more efficient" was the reason asserted by the Natchez Female Charitable Society after the 1819 epidemic for wanting to build an "Orphan House," the only time that traditional phrasing appears in their writings.[119] Enclosing children in a central facility governed by pious women was

[117] From the annual report for 1817 and 1818. Ibid., April 5, 1819.
[118] From an 1816 announcement of the formation of the Female Charitable Society of New Orleans. Administrative Papers (1816-1839), Poydras Home Collection, HTML.
[119] March 6, 1820, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.

the way to mitigate poverty's evils and, perhaps, render public assistance unnecessary. Good habits would be formed and maintained, and impoverished boys and girls would thus become productive, law-abiding members of the community. Without a permanent residence, however, there could be no true safe haven for orphans.

Despite their collective personal wealth, the members of the Female Charitable Society seem to have been unable to fund such an undertaking themselves. The officers needed a benefactor, yet no Lydia Carter stepped forward to grant a large amount. By the annual meeting of 1821, the Society's future appeared bleak: two boys and a girl were placed out "for their better advancement in life," leaving only the matron and two charity children.[120] Perhaps yellow fever coupled with financial downturn had proved too much for some members, as meetings became sparsely attended. Indeed, the annual meeting in 1821 had to be rescheduled because so few ladies bothered to show up. Nevertheless, those serving as officers still professed a strong desire for an orphan asylum, something that had been suggested, according to the report, "by many persons." In an effort to retrench, the managers then announced "that the annual subscriptions should be withheld, and the stock in Bank accumulate until such time as the Society may be called on by the dispensation of Providence to shelter the distressed widow and orphan."[121] In short, civic mothers were on strike. Somewhere, reserving their charitable support until furnished the means to dispense with the ad hoc care they had provided over the years and finally gather poor children into a household under their management.

[120] Ibid., March 5, 1821.
[121] Ibid. No date is given for this entry.

Within a few months, the Society received the donation of a town lot as well as a house for a substantially reduced price.[122] The patron who had at last stepped forward was Samuel Postlethwaite, whom the officers extolled in the next report as "a friend to every benevolent institution."[123] Mr. Postlethwaite certainly had the means to make such a contribution. He was a successful merchant and cotton planter, as well as a shrewd investor: with several other gentlemen he had helped organize the Natchez Steamboat Company which capitalized at $500,000 by 1819, and later he became president of the Bank of Mississippi.[124] Besides wealth, Postlethwaite also had sound evangelical and philanthropic credentials. He was a corresponding member of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.[125] Furthermore, he was an honorary vice president of the American Education Society along with Elias Boudinot and the heads of a number of universities.[126] Samuel Postlethwaite had also served as one of the Adams County orphan's court justices, and in that capacity he had come under the attack of the Female Charitable Society.[127]

His wife, Ann Dunbar Postlethwaite, had helped found the Society in 1816.[128] When Mr. Postlethwaite made his donation, she was serving as the Society's secretary,

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[122] Ibid., June 4, 1821.
[123] James, *Antebellum Natchez*, 150, 159. March 4, 1922, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[124] James, *Antebellum Natchez*, 193.
[125] *The Panoplist, and Missionary Herald* 15 (November 1819): 506.
[126] Samuel Postlethwaite is mentioned as having joined in September 1819. *The Religious Intelligencer*… 6 (December 1, 1821): 427.
[127] Samuel Postlethwaite appears as a justice in Orphan's Court Minutebook I (April 1803 to January 1815), ACCC.
[128] Morton Rothstein, "'The Remotest Corner': Natchez on the American Frontier," in Noel Polk, ed., *Natchez before 1830* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), 98-99, 101.

and afterward she was elected (perhaps not surprisingly) to the post of First Directress.[129] Though Samuel Postlethwaite received all the public credit for the bequest, Ann's name was on the deed beside her husband's.[130] The property may have been hers in the first place—after all, her father had been one of the largest landowners in the region. Considering the giver, the donation made in the summer of 1821 could have come much earlier. However the Female Charitable Society managed to procure land and a house, which served as the first orphan asylum, the "patron" had little more to do with it, instead leaving the household governance to his wife and the other civic mothers of Natchez.

Conclusion

> The necessity and advantages of such institutions, if acknowledged in other places, ought to be peculiarly felt in the city of Natchez, which, from various local and incidental circumstances has furnished a large proportion of those children of misfortune, for whose relief this charity is intended; and who have found in the refuge which is provided for them, that protection and kindness, which, had it not existed, they could not, in all probability, have obtained elsewhere.[131]

Nearly a hundred years had passed since the Indian attack that had occasioned the "first" orphanage in America, down the river in New Orleans, one was finally built in Natchez. Why did Samuel Postlethwaite suddenly choose to extend his patronage in support of an orphan asylum? Had he attempted and failed to secure municipal or county financing for such an undertaking? Had economic panic around 1819 prevented him from making his donation immediately after the devastating yellow fever epidemics?

[129] March 4, 1822, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[130] Deed Record Book M, ACCC, 123.
[131] *Mississippi State Gazette*, March 19, 1825.

Had stories about local poor girls and boys suffering from predatory adults ultimately convinced him of the project's merit? Whatever moved Mr. Postlethwaite to make his contribution, that civic mothers could not proceed with their desired project without the support of a city father underscores the continuing dependency of female ventures on male sanction in the early nineteenth century. The matriarchal order created by the Society relied on patriarchal approbation for its success. This is not to say that the Female Charitable Society compromised either its aims or operations. If Samuel Postlethwaite made any attempt to intrude upon the authority of benevolent women as benefactor or county official, it was of little consequence. By all accounts, the establishment and management of the asylum remained firmly in the hands of Society members, who shaped Natchez through the shaping of their institution.

The founding of orphan asylums by female associations in the early republic appears to have been something of a movement. Indeed, the similarity among societies and the rapidity with which benevolent women established residential institutions for children suggest that many Americans at last shared the sentiment that juvenile relief was in need of reform. Yet each community that constructed one was also likely responding to local problems. There is more information about why the ladies of Natchez founded the Female Charitable Society in 1816 than why, a few years later, they began advocating the creation of an orphan asylum. Some of the evangelical influences that led them to organize in the first place—a burgeoning spirit of activism among religious women, the growing imperative of schooling children in piety and morality, a changing view in the minimum acceptable standard of care for poor white minors—may have led them to

reconsider their initial trajectory. There were also catastrophic events which doubtless also played a role.

Though the ladies never refer to themselves as "civic mothers," it is clear that this is how they conceived of themselves with respect to the poor children of Natchez. And if the newspaper writer who dubbed them "ministering angels" is any indication, there were others who shared this conception. Civic motherhood entailed caring for the community's poor and orphaned children and rearing them to be moral and "useful" adults. Cast as a sanctuary, the orphan asylum in Natchez served—as many juvenile residences had functioned—as a home where children could be safely sheltered and raised according to the designs of the governing parent. The Female Charitable Society collectively acted as that parent and, through the civic household, added a new dimension to familial structure in Mississippi.

6

Civic Household

"Can the (in every other respect) patriotic city of Natchez bear this? Are there not yet some in her who cherish the principles of '76?"[1]

It was February 1825, nearly six months after the Marquis de Lafayette had arrived in the United States for his farewell tour, but a formal invitation to Mississippi had yet to be extended. Such a slight reflected very poorly on the people who inhabited this far southwestern corner of the United States, argued "Aristides" in a local newspaper. He implored fellow Natchezians to seize the opportunity, the unique honor, of hosting "the Nation's Guest" during his travels throughout the country.[2] The impassioned pleas worked, for an invitation was subsequently issued. General Lafayette accepted and visited Natchez the following April.[3]

This was not the first time the American Revolution had come to Mississippi. In 1778, an agent of Continental Congress traveled there to secure oaths of neutrality from the loyalist-leaning populace. Neutrality became moot, however, when Spain entered the

[1] *Mississippi State Gazette*, February 19, 1825.
[2] Lloyd Kramer discusses extensively the general's 1824-25 American tour in *Lafayette in Two Worlds: Public Cultures and Personal Identities in an Age of Revolutions* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) 190-22. See also Stanley J. Idzerda, Anne C. Loveland, and Marc H. Miller, *Lafayette, Hero of Two Worlds: The Art and Pageantry of His Farewell Tour of America, 1824-1825* (Flushing: Queens Museum, 1989) and Sylvia Neely, "The Politics of Liberty in the Old World and the New: Lafayette's Return to America in 1824," *Journal of the Early Republic* (Summer 1986), 151-71.
[3] Plans for the visit, which ultimately occurred on April 18, are detailed in *Mississippi State Gazette*, April 16, 1825 and recounted in the April 23, 1825 issue of that newspaper.

war and seized Natchez among other British possessions.[4] From the all the pomp and ceremony orchestrated for Lafayette, however, no one would ever guess that Natchez had initially rejected the American cause. The citizens who delivered speeches before the general effused gratitude for his role in securing an enlightened government for the region, which had permitted all the splendid accomplishments of the present community. Along with praises for the expansion of agriculture, commerce, and manufacturing in this once-wild landscape were tributes to the "civic virtue" of Mississippians, among them the diffusion of "education among all classes of society, and in every thing connected with civilization and refinement."[5]

By all accounts the gentlemen of Natchez put on a good show for the Nation's Guest when he arrived in the city on April 18, 1825. The general and a large procession of local dignitaries gathered at the house of Bank of Mississippi cashier Gabriel Tichenor and then proceeded through town toward the bluff overlooking the wide river, where stirring speeches were exchanged. Of course, the marquis was the parade's focal point, but his greatness was amplified by the governor, legislators, militia officers—all the great men of Mississippi—who marched beside him. After the parade, the general became the

[4] In 1778, Continental Congress had commissioned James Willing, a failed Natchez merchant, to undertake an expedition there to secure the neutrality of the Anglo-American populace. With the help of boatmen and adventurers, Willing obtained their oaths but then set about pillaging their homes, perhaps in retaliation for the scanty patronage of his shop. Inhabitants fled to the nearby Spanish territory for protection. They received it—for good, when Spain entered the war against England the following year, capturing all her southern possessions. The story of James Willing's raid on Natchez is usually excluded from general narratives of the American Revolution, but Robert V. Haynes discusses it extensively in *The Natchez District and the American Revolution* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1976). For additional references, see James, Antebellum Natchez, 22-24 and Ethan Allen Grant, "They Stayed On: The British Settler Community at Natchez, 1765-1800 (PhD Dissertation, Auburn University, 1993), who makes several references to the affair. See also J. F. H. Claiborne, *Mississippi as a Province, Territory and State, with Biographical Notices of Eminent Citizens*, vol. 1 (Jackson: Power & Barksdale, 1880), 117-124, which quotes extensively from several contemporary accounts pertaining to Willing's raid.

[5] *Mississippi State Gazette*, April 23, 1825.

audience for a separate procession of twenty-five delegates of "the rising generation." All were boys and under the age of ten. Presiding over the young entourage was newspaper editor Andrew Marschalk, who later reported that Lafayette gave his blessing to each child and that "in bestowing it his countenance expressed all the tenderness and benevolence of the Patriarch."[6]

Though George Washington had been gone for more than a quarter century, his comrade-in-arms was alive and in Natchez and filling the role of Pater Patriae. Indeed, Lafayette's visit was a great celebration of fatherhood, both real and symbolic. Mothers, on the other hand, were conspicuously absent from the festivities, ejected from their "natural" place alongside children. And young mothers-to-be were excluded from the children's pageant. Motherhood—the crowning achievement cultivated among all polite females in the early republic—was sidelined even in the toasts. At the dinner held for the Lafayette, the customary final raising of the glass to the fairer sex referred merely to "WOMAN" and her praise confined to general rather than specifically maternal nurturance: "When pain and anguish wring the brow/A ministering angel thou."[7] The subsequent playing of the folk tune "Come haste to the wedding" reinforced her locus with respect to her husband instead of her children.[8] Marschalk mentions only one woman by name in the newspaper, and she was single and a foreigner: British émigrée and acclaimed author Miss Frances Wright, who accompanied Lafayette through much of

[6] The boys also gave a brief address, which was recorded in the same article: "General—A few of the offspring of the many, who are indebted to your aid, for the inestimable blessing of LIBERTY, bid you welcome again, to our now happy country." *Mississippi State Gazette*, April 23, 1825.
[7] *Mississippi State Gazette*, April 23, 1825.
[8] Ibid.

his tour.[9] Except for the toast and the reference to "fair faces and graceful figures" at the ball held that evening, the women of Natchez are virtually invisible in the account.[10]

Quite by contrast, a month earlier in the same paper, the ladies had been the focal point and the gentlemen mentioned only in respect to *their* activities. The annual meeting of the Female Charitable Society had taken place, and the officers submitted their report, as they usually did, for publication. Eliza Tichenor did not appear alongside her husband's name in the account of Lafayette's parade, but she topped the list of newly-elected Society officers as First Directress.[11] In the report, the women thanked the men who had contributed toward their benevolent endeavors over the past year: Drs. Lattimore and Merrill for tending sick charity children free of charge; Mr. Marschalk for his complimentary printing services over the years; and Mr. Henry C. Walsil, who had donated $200, the proceeds of a benefit concert. As they did every year, the officers also took the opportunity to restate the aim of their voluntary enterprise:

> The design of this charity is to relieve indigence in its most deplorable form: to succor those who are incapable of helping themselves: to snatch unfortunate and destitute orphans from immediate want and wretchedness: to provide for their subsistence and comfort: to preserve them from the evil consequences of neglect, ignorance and vice: and by instilling into their minds the principles of a religious and virtuous education, and train them up as useful and respectable members of society.[12]

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[9] Lafayette regarded Frances Wright as a particular friend, and the reporter praised her for the complementary views she had lately published of America. She had written *Views of Society and Manners in America* and accompanied the Marquis de Lafayette through much of his American tour. After visiting Mississippi and other parts of the South, she went on to champion an end to slavery. Kramer, *Lafayette in Two Worlds*, 137-43, 154-71. The *Mississippi State Gazette* had nothing but praise for the lady, who may have concealed any anti-slavery sentiments she had developed by the time she entered Natchez. *Mississippi State Gazette*, April 23, 1825.

[10] *Mississippi State Gazette*, April 23, 1825

[11] *Mississippi State Gazette*, March 19, 1825

[12] Ibid.

What had begun as a collective effort to "give instruction to poor children" had metamorphosed into something far more complex over nearly ten years, and the ladies themselves had also changed. The benevolent women who had set out to serve as patronesses of education had become civic mothers, appropriating the role that had long been the province of the men who served as county officials by assuming almost complete responsibility over the welfare of young white indigent minors. Though the Female Charitable Society had demonstrated maternal care for poor children since its inception in 1816, the establishment of an orphan asylum in 1821 marked the apotheosis of female domesticity. Motherhood expanded from private homes outward into the community through the establishment of the civic household.

Orphan asylums have not been usually characterized as households in their own right. Describing them as a "second home" for certain minors, Thomas A. Hacsi asserts that "orphans asylums were just one of the many kinds of institutions that flourished during the nineteenth century. Public schools, hospitals, prisons, poorhouses, reformatories, and mental hospitals also dotted the landscape."[13] As Hacsi and other scholars contend, asylums may have been "homelike," but they were not "homes" in the normative sense of that term.[14] In other words, homes were inhabited by "families," not

[13] Thomas A. Hacsi, *Second Home: Orphan Asylums and Poor Families in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 54.

[14] In his seminal *The Care of Destitute, Neglected, and Delinquent Children* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1902), social worker Homer Folks briefly charts the history of orphan asylums beginning with the Ursuline convent in New Orleans and traces them to the large institutions that had fallen from favor in his lifetime. David J. Rothman focuses primarily on orphanages from 1830 onward, as many of the early ones were expanded. He argues that institutions in the age of industrialization were modeled on factories, aiming to systematize daily life and impose control on all who resided within. *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971). Elna C. Green refers to orphan asylums and poor houses as variations of the same institutions in *The*

"charity children" and "matrons." Because blood and marriage have dominated as criteria for what constituted a family, it is understandable that historians have tended to view these juvenile residences within an institutional rather than a familial context.[15] But a household with some aspect of family life is what the women of Natchez strove to create for the children in their protection.

Returning for a moment to the example of Eliza Tichenor, she was mistress of two households in Natchez: one that served as the gathering point for the Nation's Guest and his entourage and one at the edge of town where the charity children lived. The former was organized more along patriarchal lines, with Gabriel Tichenor serving as lord and ultimate master. The latter, however, was matriarchal in construct. True, a benevolent gentleman had enabled the asylum's founding and other men in the community supported its operations, but household authority rested squarely in the

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Business of Relief: Confronting Poverty in a Southern City, 1740-1940 (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2003).

[15] "An increasing percentage of the children who entered orphan asylums had families to which they could hope to return, and most asylum children did in fact rejoin their families after being institutionalized for a few years." Hacsi, *Second Home,* 1. Hacsi is by no means alone in regarding asylums and families as two separate entities. In one of the most influential works on the subject, Peter Laslett categorizes "persons not evidently related" but living under the same roof as "no family." *Household and Family in Past Time: Comparative Studies in the Size and Structure of the Domestic Group Over the Last Three Centuries in England, France, Serbia, Japan and Colonial North America, with Further Materials from Western Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 31. Laslett goes on to say that "a concept is needed to cover the relationships between such people" and that "such a concept must be of a neutral or even of a suspensive character." Ibid, 35. Other scholars have moved toward the more inclusive concept of "households" to allow for the consideration of non-relatives while still focusing their study on "homes" rather than "institutions." See for example, Carole Shammas, *A History of Household Government in America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004). A leading historian of early American families, John Demos likewise defines them almost entirely as individuals bound by natural and conjugal ties. See in particular *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970) as well as the essay "Digging Up Family History: Myths, Realities, and Works-in-Progress" in *Past, Present, and Personal: The Family and Life Course in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 3-23.

ladies' hands. That authority became accepted in the community and sanctioned by the State of Mississippi shortly before Lafayette's visit.

The farewell tour of the Marquis de Lafayette is usually portrayed as a momentous national event: a reflection of Americans' profound need to connect with the past, to collapse fifty years and stand alongside Revolutionary heroes, and to perpetuate their ideals.[16] While the events of April 1825 represented continuity (albeit an imagined continuity) in Natchez, a great change was also taking place. The physical landscape of the community was transformed by the construction of a new orphan asylum, a public manifestation of the community's "civic virtue," the kind extolled before Lafayette. Inside that building a group of young minors were being reared entirely by women as part of an innovative method of juvenile relief. And the state eventually granted those women legal guardianship over the children in residential care. Of course, sympathy remained an important instrument for the Female Charitable Society in garnering support, and officers continued to craft little fictions, presenting the charity children and the asylum itself in ways most likely to meet with public approbation. One of these children stepped forward as an adult to present his own tale and cast the mother rather than the father as the rightful guardian of young minors. The "Patriarch" might still be regarded as the head of the American family, but a different parent had assumed authority over the welfare of poor white children in Mississippi.

[16] Neely, "The Politics of Liberty in the Old World and the New: Lafayette's Return to America in 1824," 151-52. See also Anne C. Loveland, *Emblem of Liberty: The Image of Lafayette in the American Mind* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971) and Fred Somkin: *Unquiet Eagle: Memory and Desire in the Idea of American Freedom, 1815-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), whom Neely cites in her article.

The Matriarchal Household

Many scholars have forwarded that at the turn of the nineteenth century, the American family began to transform and that patriarchy in particular came under attack. No longer did the traditional head of household possess ultimate authority over his dependents, so goes the argument. Marriages became more companionate, women came to be seen as the moral and spiritual leader of the home, and the judiciary increasingly intervened in matters familial, gradually granting rights to "dependents" which led to a household structure more horizontal than vertical in governance.[17] While this shift in household order was not universally accepted by Americans,[18] Southern men in particular resisted the "feminization" of the family and firmly retained their authority, according to Peter Bardaglio.[19] He contends that the persistence of slavery fortified the traditional familial order and strengthened the power of fathers, husbands, and masters over their subordinates, a power that the judiciary and state legislatures upheld. Bardaglio further

[17] Carole Shammas describes the transformation of domestic roles over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in terms of a "civil war," in which the traditional household head lost authority and greater egalitarianism emerged as the victor; *A History of Household Government in America*, 3-20. Michael Grossberg argues that companionate marriages made household relationships more egalitarian over the nineteenth century and that the judiciary by its increasing invasiveness replaced "natural" fathers as patriarch of the American family. *Governing the Hearth: Law and the Family in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 24-27, 289-307. See also Carl N. Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 74-75 and John Demos, "The Changing Faces of Fatherhood," in *Past, Present and Personal: The Family and the Life Course in American History*.

[18] *In Kingdom of Matthias: A Story of Sex and Salvation in 19th-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), Paul E. Johnson and Sean Wilentz discuss the decline of power of fathers owing to the growing perception, especially among evangelicals, that women were better suited to direct household members in matters religious and moral. They posit the emergence of "prophets" such as Joseph Smith and Robert Matthews, alias Matthias, during the Second Great Awakening as a reaction to this shift in familial order and an attempt to restore patriarchal supremacy.

[19] Peter W. Bardaglio, *Reconstructing the Household: Families, Sex, and the Law in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992). Throughout this book, Bardaglio exhaustively considers court cases and legislation which demonstrate deference on the part of the state toward private family rule under the governance of the household patriarch.

asserts that in the antebellum South "two fundamental assumptions governed the relationships between male and female, master and slave: (1) women and blacks were naturally suited for subordination, and (2) the male head of household and master was naturally fitted to command this subordination," a hierarchical arrangement that lingered through the nineteenth century even after slavery's demise.[20]

The celebration of "fathers" in Natchez during the visit of the Nation's Guest certainly seems to reinforce this notion that patriarchy retained its vim and vigor in the antebellum South. Yet Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Suzanne Lebsock point out that the Southern paterfamilias softened in both image and household control along with his Northern counterpart, as the domineering patriarch of old became antithetical to the Christian and genteel ethos.[21] And in her study of the plantation mistress, Catherine Clinton notes that woman-as-mother became revered to the point of deification in the South, particularly by sons, though her power was "false" as opposed to the "real" authority maintained by fathers.[22]

Most of these studies focus on normative households, but by expanding the analytical framework to include orphan asylums established by benevolent women,

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[20] Ibid., 27.

[21] As Elizabeth Fox-Genovese avers, "Those who invoke the theory of a southern patriarchy should recall that many prominent proslavery spokesmen simultaneously rooted their defense of slavery in the subordination of women and condemned explicitly, and even passionately, the patriarchal power of the Roman paterfamilias…In truth, invocations of Christianity notwithstanding, antebellum southern domestic relations owed much of their companionate tenor to the bourgeois rhetoric of domesticity, including companionate marriage and the modern ideologies of motherhood and childrearing." *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 63-64. Suzanne Lebsock likewise advances that Southern women had emerged from the absolute control of their husbands, namely with respect to property rights. *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984), chap. 3.

[22] Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 38-40.

patriarchy appears diminished. Indeed, the civic household seems almost wholly matriarchal in governance. The philanthropic division of labor between Samuel Postlethwaite and his wife, Ann Dunbar Postlethwaite is especially illustrative of this overlooked dynamic. Though Samuel's generosity made it possible for the Female Charitable Society to at last establish an orphan asylum in Natchez, it was Ann, in her capacity as secretary, who carried out the arrangements. Immediately after receiving the bequest, Mrs. Postlethwaite made an agreement with carpenter Alexander Smith to remove the house purchased by the Society to the property that she and her husband had relinquished. Along with the purchase price, the total cost of the asylum came to around a thousand dollars, and the officers resolved to sell some of the bank stock to cover the transaction. By early August, the structure had been moved and painted, and at last the orphans and matrons moved in.[23]

Though orphan asylums are commonly excluded from studies of the American household, it is important to keep in mind that, except for children running about in blue uniforms, the asylum would have been indistinguishable from other homes in its neighborhood. The lot donated by the Postlethwaites was situated on the corner of Seventh and Third South streets in the southeastern section of the town in a residential area, and the asylum was a house, specifically the former abode of Judge John B. Taylor.[24] No description of the structure survives, but it was likely more spacious and refined than the homes that the children had previously occupied, either with the matron

[23] Painting that was "deemed necessary" was ordered at the July 30 meeting and on August 6, 1821, the house was reported ready for habitation; Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[24] At the present-day corner of Orleans and Martin Luther King. The lot measured 64 by 150 feet or 9600 square feet.

or other guardians. Judge Taylor had been a successful attorney in Natchez, and like many other affluent men of profession he had also operated a plantation. Two thousand acres and fifteen slaves testified to his considerable wealth, which was probably also reflected in his domestic trappings.[25]

Appearances aside, the asylum functioned as an ordinary household in many ways. For one thing, Society officers strove for self-sufficiency as much as possible. In the past, buying water and providing board for the charity children had been a constant drain on funds, but by building a cistern, planting a garden, and keeping livestock, basic provisions became much more economical.[26] Throughout the autumn and winter of 1821, the Society made various improvements to the property, including a picket fence, a smokehouse, and barriers around the residence "for the safety of the poultry."[27] While overseeing these building projects, the ladies continued to perform tasks more readily construed as "women's work." Four suits of clothing were made for two children, and one boy was furnished with a hat.[28]

Running an asylum demanded a great deal of effort and expense. Even so, less than a year after the Society bought Judge Taylor's house and made renovations, the officers sold it and embarked on a much more ambitious project: the construction of a new, larger building from the ground up. This scheme was made possible through the sale of the first house in the summer of 1822 for $1500 and five acres of land. Perhaps

[25] James, *Antebellum Natchez*, 111-12.
[26] A complaint about the expense of water was made at July 1, 1816 meeting, and in several other meetings that year the officers complain about the costs of lodging and boarding the children with then-matron Mrs. Floyd. The cistern is discussed on August 6 and September 3, 1821 and the garden and poultry mentioned on February 4, 1822; Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[27] Ibid., September 3 and February 4 1821; March 6, 1822.
[28] Ibid., June 4 and July 2, 1821.

Jonathan Thompson considered his very generous offer as a sort of donation, though the transaction is not described as such in the minutes.[29] The new asylum cost $2200 to build—more than seven times what the Society had paid for Judge Taylor's house.

To make up the difference from their real estate profit and these new costs, the Female Charitable Society officers resolved to step up fundraising. However, nearly five years of trying to raise sufficient funds themselves had not allowed the ladies to establish an asylum, and they soon realized that the only way a new one could be built was through a bank loan.[30] Obtaining one was not a problem. After all, the Society was a corporation with full legal rights to assume the debt, and the fact that the bank cashier married to then-Secretary Eliza Tichenor must have made the transaction all the easier. Ann Postlethwaite had ascended by this point to the position of First Directress, and the board of officers authorized her to carry out a deed of conveyance for the first asylum house and engage a craftsman to construct the second.[31] It seems that Mrs. Postlethwaite was also responsible for drawing up the plan of the new building.[32] A committee of three officers was formed, bids were solicited, and then the First Directress drew up a construction contract for Alexander Smith, the carpenter who had moved Judge Taylor's house the year before.[33]

Thanks to Eliza Tichenor's minute-taking the contract between the Society and Mr. Smith has been preserved in full. In meticulous detail, this binding written

[29] Ibid., The purchase is first mentioned on April 1. At the May 4, 1822 meeting the terms are mentioned as $1500 and two acres of land, a size that had increased to five by the July 1 meeting.
[30] Ibid., July 1 and July 17, 1822.
[31] Ibid., July 1, 1822. The Female Charitable Society held at least five meetings during this month as they executed the real estate transaction and arranged the construction of the new facility.
[32] Ibid., July 8, 1822.
[33] Ibid., July 11 and 17, 1822.

instrument lays out exactly how the asylum was to be constructed, as per Mrs. Postlethwaite's design. The four-thousand-square-foot, wood-frame house consisted of one-and-a-half levels as well as a bricked basement where the kitchen was situated. Two rooms with a large central passage were located on the main floor, and each chamber had its own chimney. Other specifications include: a staircase leading to the sleeping area above, tongue-and-grooved floors, wooden shingles on the gabled roof, weatherboarded siding on the building's exterior, and twelve windows of twenty four lights each "for the admission of air and light and convenience."[34]

An appearance of neatness and respectability had guided the Female Charitable Society in preparing the children's clothes, and those qualities lay at the heart of the new asylum structure. So was comfort. Fewer windows and fireplaces and smaller rooms would have reduced the cost, but the officers were willing to assume the greater financial burden so the charity children lived in an environment that adhered to new standards of healthful and convenient living that were also pleasing to eye.[35] The Female Charitable Society was concerned about ensuring a comfortable standard of living for charity children and had been from the beginning. During the first year, when the boys and girls resided with Mrs. Floyd, the officers made extensive purchases: salt, water barrels, a "milch cow," blankets, warm clothes, and "wood sufficient to keep them comfortable during the winter season."[36] As the new asylum was being built in 1822, the Society prepared bed ticks, sheets, and towels for a number of boys and girls so that they could

[34] Ibid., July 21, 1822. From "Agreement with Alexander Smith."
[35] For an excellent discussion on changes in domestic "built environments" at the turn of the nineteenth century, see Nora Pat Small, *Beauty and Convenience: Architecture and Order in the New Republic* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2003).
[36] October 2, 1816, NCHR.

sleep well and keep clean.[37] Clothes were fashioned for the children at the same time, and given that the same blue cloth was used for towels and apparel, there was probably little risk of the children appearing as though they were "aping their betters." However, they must have looked to be in a better condition than the poor white children "under-the-hill" or enslaved children running around barefooted and clad in coarse clothes, sometimes simply in oversized shirts. Cost rather than comfort was the rule in outfitting slaves.[38]

As John E. Crowley has shown, Americans in the latter eighteenth century began to regard material ease and convenience as necessities rather than luxuries. Those with means built larger homes and decorated them more ornately and furnished them more lavishly than ever before. In the Southern states, many planters also began to improve the condition of slave quarters, building frame houses with brick floors and chimneys. Some masters may have been truly concerned about the welfare of their "servants" while others merely wished to create that appearance, yet comprehensive material improvements in plantations enhanced the aura of gentility.[39] In a similar respect, a neat and commodious abode for orphans reflected well upon the city. Travelers took notice of asylums. Presbyterian minister Timothy Flint visited New Orleans in 1822 and

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[37] Judith Reiter Weissman and Wendy Lavitt, *Labors of Love: America's Textiles and Needlework, 1650-1930* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 5, 26-27, 105.

[38] October 10, 1822, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR. Marie Jenkins Schwartz discusses the clothing of enslaved children extensively in, noting that cost rather than comfort guided masters in outfitting their slaves. *Born in Bondage: Growing Up Enslaved in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000). See also Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in 19th Century America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 15-16.

[39] John E. Crowley, *The Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities and Design in Early Modern Britain and Early America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 87-94. See also idem., "The Sensibility of Comfort," *The American Historical Review* 104 (June 1999): 749-82 and Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Knopf, 1992).

commented extensively on the buildings he saw as well as the handiwork of the civic mothers there:

> The female orphan asylum is a most interesting charity, dating its efficient operations from the charity of the benevolent Poydras. When I visited this place, there were between seventy and eighty female children under sober and discreet instructresses, all plainly and neatly clad, all engaged either with their sewing or their book, and all rescued from a condition the most completely forlorn and destitute. There is a liberality in their religious instruction, about the merits of which people of course will differ. They are dressed in uniforms of domestic cotton, and plain white bonnets, and under their instructresses they worship one part of the time in the cathedral and the other in the Presbyterian church.[40]

Flint had come to New Orleans from Natchez but recorded no observation of the orphan asylum there, perhaps because Judge Taylor's house looked to be one of many genteel residences in town. Instead, his remarks about Natchez were brief and largely confined to the picturesque vista atop the bluff as well as horrors that lurked on the riverbank below. Making the children more conspicuously comfortable might serve to magnify the city's refinement while countering the depravity "under-the-hill," the first impression of most newcomers.

In 1822, most of Natchez's grand showcase homes had yet to be built. The new orphan asylum was therefore somewhat comparable to genteel residences in the area with respect to size.[41] For example, ten years earlier architect Levi Weeks had constructed the town manse Auburn with a base of sixty by forty feet, while the asylum boasted only slightly smaller dimensions of fifty by thirty-five. However, the similarity ended there. Auburn was constructed entirely from brick, the ceilings were higher, and a portico with

[40] Timothy Flint, *Recollections of the Last Ten Years in the Valley of the Mississippi*, ed. George R. Brooks (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968), 220.
[41] Mary Wallace Crocker, "Asher Benjamin: The Influence of His Handbooks on Mississippi Buildings," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 38 (October 1979): 266-70.

Corinthian columns soared thirty-one feet above the ground fronted the elegant abode.[42] With the exterior painted, and the walls inside plastered throughout, the asylum would have appeared neat on all sides, though the discerning eye would not have mistaken it for an affluent residence. But neither would it have been taken for a lowly dwelling. Judging by the descriptions of houses built at the turn of the nineteenth century, the floor plan and materials used for the orphan asylum mirrored those found in the residences of prosperous artisans and middling merchants elsewhere in the nation.[43]

Mrs. Postlethwaite and her fellow Female Charitable Society officers designed the asylum to be not only functional but instructive. From the post-and-rail fence and painted gutters outside to the washboards and closets inside, each mundane feature showed the children the domestic environment they should strive for as adults. Improving the material surroundings of poor children was humane, but encouraging them toward consumption on the level of their patrons' sons and daughters subverted the social order and rendered everyone miserable as a result.[44] Enclosing charity children within

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[42] From a letter dated September 27, 1812, transcribed in Charles E. Peterson, "Natchez," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 15 (May 1956): 27-28. Levi Weeks was also the architect and builder of the Presbyterian church, which was constructed around the same time as Auburn.

[43] Bernard L. Herman, "The Architectural and Social Topography of Early Nineteenth-Century Portsmouth, New Hampshire," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 5 (1995): 230-34. See also Nora Pat Small, *Beauty and Convenience: Architecture and Order in the New Republic* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003); Henry Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia: A Structural Analysis of Historic Artifacts* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975); Sally McMurry, *Families and Farmhouses in Nineteenth-Century America: Vernacular Design and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Allen G. Noble, *Wood, Brick, and Stone: The North American Settlement Landscape* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984).

[44] Elite women engaged in organized benevolence during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were concerned with improving the present situation and future prospects of the poor while maintaining the traditional, deferential social order. See Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism* and Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* as well as Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986). On the similar tactics employed by the male-run Charleston Orphan House and the aim of its

mean surroundings could be equally destructive. The Natchez hospital could have served as a shelter for orphans, but it had deteriorated into an eyesore. According to one observer in 1820, "its walls crumbling to dust, and hastening to ruin, not by time, but negligence; its apartments, the refuge of beasts of the field, not of man, from the storm—a sanctuary for the vile, not an asylum."[45] Boys and girls could not be safely tended in such an environment, nor could they be brought up to respect neatness and order, which were deemed essential to moral virtue.

Unfortunately, Alexander Smith's contract is one of the last items in the first minutebook, and the next, covering the remainder of 1822 and extending through most of 1835, was lost many years ago. The only information about the asylum and the Female Charitable Society during this period comes from annual reports and other notices printed in local newspapers, which of course were carefully crafted for the public and omit the insightful details about the ladies' operational activities found in their private records. The minutebook commencing in 1835 yields a picture of daily life and household government, which probably did not differ much from the period that cannot be as thoroughly accounted for due to the loss of documentary evidence.

Just as Society officers determined the material order of the civic household, they set the schedule for children and staff. Though the schedule does not appear in documentary evidence until 1837, it had likely been in place from the beginning. In an arrangement similar to the Poydras Asylum in New Orleans, school lessons were

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commissioners to cultivate obedience and deference among poor children, see Bellows, *Benevolence Among Slaveholders*, 136-39.

[45] *Mississippi Republican*, May 20, 1819.

conducted from 8 to 12 each morning, with the hours from 2 to 6 devoted to sewing.[46] Initially the ladies had spent much time in preparing outfits for the children, but after the establishment of the asylum, the task fell primarily to matrons and female "objects of charity." By plying the needle, girls were meeting an immediate need as well as developing an employable skill. They probably also assisted with cooking and cleaning in order to learn housekeeping, the other profession to which poor females were directed. The schedule followed in orphan asylums has been described as tedious and rigid, but the officers of the Female Charitable Society may have themselves grown up with a strict routine dominated by a combination of schoolwork and needlework.[47]

Boys and girls were given the same rudimentary instruction, though it is unlikely that all were taught to sew. While the officers do not describe vocational training for male charity children, there must have been plenty of work for them to do around the house. There was wood to chop, water to carry, gutters to clean, and the countless other heavy chores required of a large household. There was also livestock and a garden to tend. Indeed, the absence of boys caused problems for the exclusively female Poydras Asylum in New Orleans, as "masculine chores" required outside laborers, and sometimes they were not to be found.[48] By contrast, the orphan asylum in Natchez never seemed lacking for hands. In fact, one boy was hired out for a while, and his wages were counted

[46] May 3, 1837, Minutebook III (December 1835 to July 1840), NCHR.
[47] Hacsi, *Second Home*, 148-55. As Janet Carey Eldred and Peter Mortensen point out, early republic boarding schools for ladies observed rigorous schedules where the day began at five in the morning with long periods devoted to needlework as well as academic subjects. *Imagining Rhetoric: Composing Women of the Early United States* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002), 52-53.
[48] "The Managers regret the unproductive state of the garden during the last year," the ladies wrote in their 1823 annual report; "the great difficulty of procuring labourers on advantageous terms will oblige them to reduce the plan of cultivation to a sufficiency of vegetables for the supply of the Establishment." January 16, 1823, Minutebook I (January 1817 to January 1823), Poydras Home Collection, HTML.

in the yearly income.[49] Accepting children of both sexes led to a more self-contained household, one the Natchez Female Charitable Society hoped would set poor boys and girls on a trajectory appropriate to their gender as well as class.

Though Female Charitable Society officers oversaw all aspects of the asylum, they did not attend to the daily management of charity children, just as they usually engaged the assistance of tutors and, more often than not, enslaved nannies in raising their own sons and daughters.[50] With poor children, they adopted an almost entirely managerial role: raising funds, making decisions, enforcing regulations, serving as liaisons between the institution and the public—in short, all the masculine tasks ordinarily undertaken by the family patriarch. Meanwhile, the direct care of the inmates was consigned to a woman who labored out of necessity rather than from a spirit of charity. Only white women were hired for the task, perhaps because they were considered better equipped to impart correct principles without constant supervision. The wages and orders that "matrons" and "governesses" received from the ladies rendered them subordinate, yet it seems the maternal ethos that asylum officers projected of themselves in the community was also expected of hired surrogates.[51]

How exactly these surrogates handled their young charges must be left to speculation, but the Female Charitable Society frequently pointed to qualities that were not mentioned as requisites for the men and women who took on apprentices. In various annual reports, matrons were praised for their "affectionate care of the children" as well

[49] From the 1827 annual report, printed in the *Natchez Gazette*, April 5, 1827.
[50] See Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress* (New York: Pantheon, 1984) and Susanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860*.
[51] Though focusing on the latter nineteenth century, Thomas a Hacsi discusses asylum "staff" in *Second Home*, 81-85.

as the "great sacrifices" made in tending them, as if they were natural rather than hired mothers.[52] The institution as a whole was cast in a distinctly maternal light, as the officers noted in one annual report: "were it not for the Asylum, which like a kind mother, has received [orphans] into its bosom…they would, in all probability have been wretched and friendless."[53] Whether or not the asylum truly afforded charity children kindness and affection, the Society projected at least the semblance of doing so, yet another point of deviation from the patriarchal civil system of juvenile relief.[54]

To be sure, the officers of the Natchez Female Charitable Society held full authority over the management of the asylum and its operations. They also continued to gain authority over the children themselves. If anything, the acquisition of a permanent structure increased the perception in the community that poor children were better placed with the ladies. Overseers of the poor were not tied to a specific location, and the justices of the orphan's court met infrequently, whereas the asylum stood as a ready repository for boys and girls in need. When the first structure was open for occupancy in August 1821, one officer reported the discovery of "two destitute orphans in the country," and she was subsequently commissioned by the board to have the children delivered at the asylum.[55] Perhaps the orphans lacked proper settlement, or perhaps overseers of the poor and orphan's court justices were bypassed once again.

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[52] Quotations taken respectively from *Mississippi State Gazette*, March 19, 1825 and *Mississippi Statesman and Gazette*, March 28, 1829.
[53] *Mississippi Gazette*, April 5, 1827.
[54] On qualities of motherhood cultivated among women of the middle and upper classes, see Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, 84-98. See also Carl Degler, *At Odds*, chap. 4.
[55] August 6, 1821, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.

By constructing a civic household, the Female Charitable Society was finally able to secure legal authority over poor white children in its care. In February 1825, a couple of months before General Lafayette's visit to Natchez, the Mississippi legislature enacted a bill that designated this corporate body "Guardians over the children, who may partake of the benfits of their institution, until they shall have attained lawful age."[56] Minutebook entries show that officers used the power of guardianship in ways reminiscent of overseers of the poor and orphan's court justices. County officials could dissolve parental authority, as they did in 1819 with Elisha Crosby. When this "pauper" was determined "unfit to take care of or bring up his children," the minors were removed from his care and bound out as apprentices. As per state law, the asylum officers could exert a matriarchal prerogative over the traditional head of household. Early in 1838, for example, they declared the father of William and John Gray "intemperate, and totaly unfit to have the children with him." Additionally, Eliza James's father was found "not qualified to have the care of her," and so all three children were retained.[57] In the early nineteenth century, the paterfamilias still held considerable sway over his "little commonwealth," but class could trump gender and limit a poor father's rule if civic mothers found his habits inconsistent with their notion of proper childrearing.[58]

[56] Chapter 38, "AN ACT to change the name and style of the Female Charitable Society, and for other purposes," enacted February 3, 1825. *Laws of the State of Mississippi, Passed at the Eighth Session of the General Assembly, held in the Town of Jackson* (Jackson: Silas Brown, 1825), 87-88.
[57] Both references appear for the entry on February 28, 1838, Minutebook III (December 1835 to July 1840), NCHR.
[58] Orphan's Court Minutebook II (February 1815 to January 1820), ACCC, 32. Peter W. Bardaglio has observed that confiscation of children from fathers by county officials was less common in the South than in the North. *Reconstructing the Household*, 81-82. The infrequency of Southern fathers deemed unfit by the state seems to bear out in Natchez, as only one instance of confiscation is known.

Even with the creation of a civic household, the old civil system of juvenile relief was not abandoned altogether. Placing children with individual families remained an important component of care, yet asylum officers rather than county officials determined when their protégés would leave and where they would go—or not go. Upon examining one prospective residence in Natchez, the officers decided that they did "not approve of placing the girls from the asylum in a boarding house."[59] They also rejected sending children to the poorhouse located just outside town. When officers received a request from a man living there, they visited the place to "judge its fitness as a home" but found it "manifestly an improper home for [his] children." It was then determined that "they shall remain in the Asylum."[60] Benevolent women shunned promiscuous places where males and females cohabited with scant supervision, sometimes with dangerous consequences. Therefore, charity children were released only when officers found them a comparable or superior environment.

At first glance, the asylum itself might have appeared promiscuous, for male and female orphans slept under the same roof. As discussed earlier, most juvenile residences established by women in the early republic catered solely to females, like the Poydras Asylum in New Orleans. In the surviving records of the Natchez Female Charitable Society there is no mention of any difficulties arising from the presence of boys and girls at the asylum. Given that the children were generally under ten years of age, the threat of one child seducing or sexually assaulting another may have seemed remote if not

[59] April 5, 1837, Minutebook III (December 1835 to July 1840), NCHR.
[60] The poorhouse was visited on June 7, 1837 and decision made on July 5, 1837; Minutebook III, Natchez Children's Home Records. Christopher L. Stacey discusses the Adams County poorhouse in "The Political Culture of Slavery and Public Poor Relief in the Antebellum South," *Journal of Mississippi History* 63 (Spring 2001): 137.

impossible. The highly delicate nature of this subject kept the officers from recording any infractions or discussing how successfully the matrons kept the orphans from indulging their physical curiosity about one another, or of exploring their own bodies in a manner that was, by the early nineteenth century, becoming an issue of grave concern among pious parents.[61] Decorum and prudence demanded some kind of separation by gender: the privy at the new asylum building had two compartments, presumably one for boys and the other for girls, and the house itself was partitioned throughout to keep the two sexes discreetly apart.[62]

Still, the officers eventually found the arrangement problematic. In 1829, they announced that "for many reasons, which need not be detailed…it is their intention to appeal to the public for aid in erecting an additional building, for the residence of the orphan boys."[63] The officers pointed out that other communities had instituted a separate residence for male orphans, the implication being that Natchez would fall behind or perhaps appear uncivilized by not following suit.[64] However, the appeal failed to gain support, and so the officers continued to care for boys and girls together within a single edifice. However, male children who declined to respect matriarchal governance were forced out. In 1837, for example, the officers resolved to find another situation for

[61] Sterling Fishman, "The History of Childhood Sexuality," *Journal of Contemporary History* 17 (April 1982): 273-77.
[62] "Agreement with Alexander Smith" dated July 21, 1822, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[63] *Mississippi Statesman and Gazette*, March 28, 1829.
[64] Ibid.

Kenedy Ford who had, in their estimation, "arrived at an age when he seems no longer amenable to female control."[65]

To have greater control over the upbringing of charity children is precisely why the Female Charitable Society sought to form a household of their own. The ready-made house that served as the first incarnation of the orphan asylum anchored their efforts and demonstrated the efficacy of this novel form of juvenile relief. Because there were enough within the Society and the community who believed that poor children were better served through residential care, the ladies procured the means to construct an entirely new building according to their vision of what constituted a proper domestic environment. In 1825, the Mississippi legislature manifested its support for that vision not only by granting the asylum guardianship rights but also by awarding it an annual grant of funds.[66] By all accounts, the money was not accompanied by male interference in female governance. The women of Natchez maintained control of their venture, which was no longer a completely voluntary enterprise. Indeed, with the acceptance of state funds—raised in part through tax revenue—the orphan asylum became part of the public infrastructure. The grant, however, was but one component of the asylum's annual income, and so the ladies continued to rely heavily on donations. Cultivating sympathy for charity children remained a vital fundraising strategy, and new stories were crafted in order to secure the generosity of affluent citizens, stories that often contained more fiction than truth.

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[65] August 2, 1837, Minutebook III (December 1835 to July 1840), NCHR.
[66] *Laws of the State of Mississippi, Passed at the Eighth Session of the General Assembly, held in the Town of Jackson* (Jackson: Silas Brown, 1825), 88.

Female Orphan Asylum

> In other parts of our country, where charitable establishments of this description have been created, they have not only been liberally patronized by benevolent individuals, but in divers instances, amply endowed by the munificence of State Legislatures…The subscribers and benefactors to the "Female Charitable Society" of Natchez will have learned with pleasure, that an application made to the legislature of Mississippi, in its behalf was attended with success, and a liberal grant of $500 per annum assigned in aid of its funds. Its name has likewise been altered to that of the Orphan Asylum, of Natchez, a title which comports better with the nature and end of the institution than that by which it was formerly designated.[67]

As Natchezians made preparations for the arrival of the Marquis de Lafayette, benevolent women made their own modifications: removing themselves from public display by renaming their enterprise, and thus directing attention toward the charity children and the sanctuary in which they lived.[68] The administrative structure of the Female Society remained intact with its directresses, treasurer, secretary, and monthly managers, though in published communications the officers refer to themselves collectively as "the managers." From 1825 onward, annual reports call the establishment the "Natchez Orphan Asylum" or simply the "Orphan Asylum," which conveyed to prospective donors a much clearer cause than "Female Charitable Society." By fading into the structure, the ladies were able to advance an image that carried a greater sense of urgency as well as greater emotional currency, which in turn held the potential to attract more substantial financial gifts.

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[67] *Mississippi State Gazette*, March 19, 1825.
[68] *Laws of the State of Mississippi, Passed at the Eighth Session of the General Assembly, held in the Town of Jackson* (Jackson: Silas Brown, 1825), 87.

But outside the minutebooks and published reports, the institution seems to have been known by a different name: "Female Orphan Asylum." Similar to "Female Charitable Society," this name was commonly applied to juvenile residences founded by women around the United States. In the cases of New Orleans and Washington, D.C. and Petersburg, Virginia among many other contemporary residences, it accurately reflected the inhabitants.[69] The asylum in Natchez was unusual in admitting boys as well as girls, yet somehow the descriptor "female" became applied.

Richard C. Langdon, a former overseer of the poor, may have been the first to project the impression that the asylum in Natchez catered exclusively to girls. Langdon was also editor of *The Ariel*, rival newspaper to the *Mississippi State Gazette*, run by Andrew Marschalk, another former overseer, or "trustee" of the poor, as they were known by 1825.[70] In December of that year, Richard Langdon printed an editorial, one of the few known instances in which a third party published an account pertaining to the ladies and their charitable work. Langdon entitled his piece "Female Orphans' Asylum," an institution he suggests had existed for some time in the community, though sadly, without receiving due attention. To coax citizens from their complacency, he issued a lengthy praise of the asylum's merits, especially the fact that it did not advance any particular religious denomination or assist only one class of minors but adhered to the "principles of universal philanthropy." In terms reminiscent of the portrayals rendered by the ladies in annual reports, Langdon casts the charity children as full orphans,

[69] In his database of Southern Charities, Timothy J. Lockley of the University of Warwick lists these institutions among others; http://www.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/SouthernCharitiesProject/index.htm
[70] Daniel C. Vogt includes these two men in a list of overseers of the poor from 1818-21. "Poor Relief in Frontier Mississippi, 1798-1832," *Journal of Mississippi History* 51 (1989): 194-95.

completely bereft of adult guardians who could nurture and protect them. The asylum endeavored to fill the parental role for these unlucky creatures, he asserts, yet efforts to assist poor children were crippled by lack of funds. Langdon points out that whereas the hospital and recently opened poor house were supported by taxpayers, the asylum relied completely on voluntary contributions—to its peril.[71]

Perhaps Langdon was unaware that, nearly a year before, the State of Mississippi had pledged an annual grant of funds to the orphan asylum. However, if he was as familiar with the institution as he claimed, surely he would have observed that it housed boys as well as girls. Nevertheless, he paints the image that the asylum served females alone, females who would otherwise be abandoned to a wretched fate:

> It is in vain that we attempt to render happy the last moments of a devoted father or fond mother, if they behold from the death-bed, the little offspring of conjugal affection, without food, without clothing, and worse than all, without a friend or a home. The protection of heaven is all they can expect; but better, ten thousand times better would it be, had the orphan been consigned to the same grave with the departed parent, than to be cast upon the boisterous wave of life, without a friendly hand to guide its course. How often do we hear those in affluence, exclaiming against those poor deluded females, whom debauchery has rendered the objects of disgust and pity. Can they become the objects of hatred? Do they deserve our scorn? Have they not some excuse, who are thrown on the wide world in infancy, without any protection from the snares and vices of the more powerful sex![72]

The story Richard Langdon tells of the girls who would suffer deeply for the lack of a sanctuary evokes *The Children in the Wood* and similar popular tales of unfortunate orphans. There is no mention of intemperance, marital strife, or myriad other common reasons for household fracture in Mississippi. Instead, the imaginary orphans were the

[71] *The Ariel*, December 12, 1825.
[72] Ibid.

daughters "of conjugal affection," left alone in the world not through any fault of their parents but because of the untimely arrival of fatal illness. As a result, these innocent daughters were left as prey to "the more powerful sex," who would lure them into perdition. An early death, perhaps even a murder in the melodramatic, knife-wielding sense of *The Children in the Wood*, would be a preferable end according to Langdon.

On their own, the words "female" and "orphan" conveyed impressions of weakness, but when linked together, the aura of frailty increased exponentially. As an editor, Richard Langdon knew well the force that words could exert, and he crafted this little fiction to melt readers' hearts into acquiescence. Ironically, he cast the great protectors of female orphans as feeble in their own right. He claims that benevolent women presently suffered because they depended totally on the generosity of local citizens. Though untrue, Langdon no doubt hoped it made a compelling story. He ends his editorial by charging the "gentlemen" of Natchez to step forward and lend their assistance to the asylum. If they did not, implies Langdon, *they* would bear responsibility for the loss of female innocence.[73]

On the whole, the ladies seem to have referred to the civic household as the "Orphan Asylum," though the additional modifier of "Female" was applied by others. However, the officers did share some of Richard Langdon's fictions in their communications to the citizenry. In the annual report for 1827, for example, they once again delineate the virtues of residential relief and assert that "the loss of parents is thus in a great measure supplied by an institution, which owes its existence to the hand of

[73] Ibid.

charity."[74] The treasurer's account in the same report shows that $1000 had been received the previous year from the state, while only $680.37 had been collected locally from donations and subscriptions. Perhaps the officers viewed money given by the Mississippi legislature as "charity" rather than an appropriation of public revenue, or more likely, they knew that emphasizing voluntary contributions as the primary source of income was the best way to keep Natchezians engaged and supportive of the civic household. Otherwise, it would fade into obscurity and ignominy like the old hospital.

Anyone could walk by the orphan asylum and see its neatness and order, see the boys and girls—well-clad and well-fed—diligently attending to their studies. Without question, making a favorable spectacle of charity was vital to the institution's success, as were stories about the children, whether vague or downright fictive. For the most part, stories were submitted to the public by the ladies themselves, though the impassioned plea of the editor of *The Ariel* is a notable exception. In 1827, the same newspaper ran an advertisement from a former asylum resident, the only known documentary evidence from someone of the earliest group of charity children. Richard Langdon took the unusual step of introducing the advertisement with a brief account of the "Female Orphan Asylum," portraying it in a much happier light than he had nearly two years earlier and describing its present situation as "flourishing."[75] He then goes on to make a clarification about the establishment: "Altho' the Asylum was intended originally for the education and rearing of female orphans; yet the directors of the Institution, extending their benevolent feelings as the means for gratifying them increase, receive such orphans of the

[74] *Mississippi Statesman and Natchez Gazette*, April 5, 1827.
[75] *The Ariel*, September 7, 1827.

other sex under their protection as they may deem worthy."[76] Langdon probably would have kept silent about the fact that the asylum welcomed boys as well as girls had not the writer of the advertisement been male.

This former asylum resident was now living with George Dougherty, "a respectable citizen of this county," who may have also had a hand in drafting the notice. How much of the young man's account is true or how much he wrote himself is impossible to determine.[77] Nevertheless, it is worth examining closely for the reason it was submitted: as "an interesting evidence" of all the claims that the editor and the ladies had made regarding the necessity and usefulness of the asylum:

> *A Lost Son*. PHILANDER BOYCE was brought from Kentucky, as he believes, to Natchez about 14 years ago, being then about 4 years old. He knows nothing of his father who brought him here but that his name was *John Boyce*, or of his mother but that her name was *Mary*, and she was living when he was taken from her; and had no other child living.
>
> *Philander, snatched from his affectionate mother in tender infancy, owes lasting obligation, to the Female Orphan Asylum, which for many years afforded him every thing but a parent's love.*
>
> He has now arrived at manhood, and he would gladly return to alleviate the cares and comfort the declining years of his mother, if she be living. Should she see this, or should it meet the eye of a relation or of a remaining friend of the family, and would she or they communicate the place of their residence to him, or to the Editor of the Ariel, Natchez, it will be met with inexpressible joy; and Philander, poor as he is, will travel to any part of the United States to meet them.
>
> The Editors of the Newspapers in Kentucky will please to copy this.[78]

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[76] Ibid.

[77] Historians of early American children universally lament the dearth of narratives and other written evidence from childhood. For one thing, children rarely left behind written evidence. When they did, their words were almost always filtered through adults, which could have been the situation in the case of this advertisement. On the problem of sources with respect to the history of children as well as a sample from early modern "child diarists," see Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500 to 1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984). See also Robert H. Bremner, ed., *Children and Youth in America: A Documentary History, Volume I, 1600-1865* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

[78] *The Ariel*, September 7, 1827.

Supposing for a moment that Philander's story contains more truth than fiction, the statement offers a glimpse into the perspective of an orphan looking back on his childhood. John Boyce was the household patriarch as well as the boy's legal guardian, yet Philander describes his mother as the rightful parent, owing to his "tender infancy." Having left Kentucky at such an early age, he probably barely remembered Mary Boyce. It could have been that *she* was the real villain in the story, and that her husband had "snatched" away their son in order to protect him. Regardless of what actually happened, the impulse to reunite with his natural mother was so strong that Philander was willing to endure considerable hardship to achieve it.

Philander says nothing about his stay in the Female Orphan Asylum, or the fact that he may not have actually resided there. He first appears in the minutebook in June 1818, which would have made him around eight years old when he first entered the care the Female Charitable Society. Philander was one of several boys and girls placed under the tutelage of Messrs. Sawyer and Smith, the school where the charity children were enrolled after the collapse of the Lancastrian Academy.[79] In May 1820, he is mentioned again. More than two years of instruction seems to have done little good for Philander, for one manager reported in this entry that he was "very backward" in his studies.[80] Then in November of that same year, the officers placed the boy with a "Mr. Matthewson."[81] This may have been "Dan Mathewson, a silversmith and repairer of clocks and watches," who had taken a pauper boy as an apprentice the same year.[82] Philander disappears from

[79] June 1, 1818, Minutebook I (March 1816 to December 1822), NCHR.
[80] Ibid., May 1, 1820.
[81] Ibid., November 6, 1820.
[82] Orphan's Court Minutebook III (January 1820 to October 1824), ACCC, 42.

the records after November 1820, though he may have at some point been returned to the Society like Olivia Wrice, the girl placed with Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Green. With the loss of the second minutebook, there is no way to tell which children were at the asylum from 1823 through most of 1835, though Philander implies in the advertisement that he *had* lived there.

However long Philander Boyce resided in the civic household, his account shows him to be a successful outcome of the ladies' careful management. At eighteen, his age at the time the notice was printed, he was still legally an "infant," though he refers to himself as "arrived at manhood" and ready to assume the duties of a man.[83] Reared for long stretches of time without an adult male role model, he now sought to invert the dynamic to its traditional form and become the provider for females—in particular his long lost mother—rather than their ward. There is no indication that Philander followed the profession of Mr. Matthewson, or that he had a profession at all. Even if the young man worked as a wage laborer, Natchez still held better prospects for him than his birthplace, where he would have been a virtual stranger. Philander certainly could have remained anonymous and gone about his life without troubling himself over an old woman, though his story implies that the asylum and the benevolent women who managed it had developed in him a strong sense of filial duty and of how a "son" ought to act.

[83] For interesting discussion on masculinity in the Southern states during the antebellum period, see Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover, eds., *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004).

In his one reference to the Female Orphan Asylum, Philander proclaims that he received there everything he needed—except "a parent's love." This assertion (if, indeed, he made it) may not have been intended as a slight to civic mothers. Instead, it seems an acknowledgment that some provisions had no substitute. At the asylum were matrons who served as surrogate mothers and fellow residents who were surrogate brothers and sisters, and from top to bottom it truly appeared as a home. It could not, however, replace the relationships Philander had lost. To publicly profess the inability to give charity children "everything" was consistent with the view of benevolent women that boys and girls should grow up with their natural parents, in particular their own mother. Catastrophes like yellow fever epidemics occasionally broke apart families, but very often domestic ruptures resulted from poverty, intemperance, violence, and many other afflictions that seemed to plague the laboring classes. By creating a sanctuary that also served as a model household environment, the ladies of Natchez hoped that poor children could be reared to be responsible parents themselves and eventually diminish the need for charity and public assistance.

Conclusion

The story of Philander Boyce is reminiscent of fictional tales and "authentic narratives" of children in danger, which abounded during the early republic. Like the account of the little Osage orphan, Philander's is a tale of abduction, but in a twist on an old plot, the villain was not a stranger but the child's own father. From the stories communicated by benevolent women or supporters like Richard Langdon or a former

resident like Philander Boyce, men come across as scoundrels and predators—a far cry from the steadfast, munificent portrayals of patriotic "fathers" who were celebrated during Lafayette's "farewell" visit.

Assuming the role of civic mothers, benevolent women established a household under their own governance, secured funding from the state, and garnered jurisdiction over the community's poor young children. Confident in the stability of their institution, the ladies at last made a partial confession about their wards. Similar to Richard's disclosure that the asylum welcomed boys as well as girls, the officers admitted another truth about the charity children in their 1829 annual report: "The managers now state that they have resolved to receive, under certain circumstances, very destitute children, even though they be not in the strict sense of the word, *orphans*—Many children have come within their knowledge, who although they have a parent or parents living, are nevertheless as really orphan as if they had not."[84] What is left unsaid is that the "resolution" to assist children without family had been in place for some time. In the first minutebook there is no indication that the women dealt with fathers, but there were several mothers who were placed them into or took their sons and daughters out of the Female Charitable Society's care. However, explaining these lingering family ties to the public was too complicated and potentially counter-productive. It was simpler and more effective to cast the charity children as pitifully as possible. Indeed, after admitting that some of the children still had parents living in the 1828 report, the officers go on to use

[84] *Mississippi Statesman and Gazette*, March 28, 1829.

the term as they had before, stating "that the claims of the orphan are too well understood by the community to fail of enlisting sympathy and actual assistance."[85]

Far more than a shelter, the orphan asylum functioned as a household—a civic household—headed not by men but by women. The asylum also represented a family. "She will be required to instruct in all the common branches of education, to prepare and assist in the sewing for the family," wrote the officers when discussing the qualifications required of a new governess in 1838. "She will also be expected to attend to family worship."[86] Referring to charity children as a collection of sons and daughters was common among those engaged in juvenile residential relief. In the 1740s, George Whitefield frequently referred to the residents of Bethesda as his "family," and the officers of female asylums followed suit.[87] Shunning impersonal institutions like the hospital and poorhouse, the women who founded the Orphan Asylum of Natchez strove to create a normative household under their direction. Fathers may have reigned in private homes, but with respect to child welfare, public policy became grounded in motherhood.

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[85] Ibid.
[86] February 14, 1838, Minutebook III (December 1835 to July 1840), NCHR.
[87] See George Whitefield, *An Account of the Money Received and Disbursed for the Orphan-House in Georgia* (London: W. Strahan, 1741), 3, 4 as well as his *A Further Account with God's Dealings with the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield…to Which is Annex'd a Brief Account of the Rise, Progress, and Present Situation of the Orphan-House in Georgia* (London: W. Strahan, 1747), 32, 33. Down the river in New Orleans, the ladies of the Poydras Female Orphan Asylum also cast their institution in domestic terms, declaring that "all the family, except the governess, must be in bed at half after nine o'clock." February 22, 1817, Minutebook I (January 1817 to January 1823), Poydras Home Collection, HTML.

Conclusion

> Before closing this, the eleventh report of the Orphan Asylum, the Managers believe that a brief review of the history of the institution, and what has been accomplished by it, will best assert its claims to public patronage, and will best satisfy its generous supporters, that their donations have not been uselessly expended. This institution was first established in 1816, under the name of the Female Charitable Society, which has since been changed to the Orphan Asylum. A few ladies witnessing with feelings of pain, the many destitute orphans of this vicinity agreed to contribute annually certain sums towards their support and instruction. It was thus the Society began.[1]

In their 1828 report, presented at the anniversary meeting and subsequently published in a local newspaper, the managers of the Natchez Orphan Asylum recounted the history of their institution. Natchez abounded with poor children and nothing was being done for them, so the narrative implies, until a number of ladies organized in the name of charity. The account fails to mention, however, that a civil system of juvenile relief had long been in place in 1816 and continued to operate for many years thereafter. Local gentlemen who took oaths of office as overseers of the poor and justices of the orphan's court were, by law, responsible for the welfare of the county's indigent minors. While those minors may have appeared languishing for want of support, an apparatus for relief was there.

Perhaps the ladies felt that county officials did not deserve any mention, but then the 1828 report also omits the involvement of gentlemen to whom the orphan asylum owed much, such as the Reverend Daniel Smith. According to his own account, *he* was

[1] From the annual report. printed in *The Ariel*, April 12, 1828.

the one who had suggested the formation of a society, and at first the women "strenuously objected" to the idea, believing that "there was no necessity for such an institution."[2] Daniel Smith had left Natchez for Louisville, Kentucky some time after 1819, and there he had died in 1823.[3] The women who were managing the orphan asylum in 1828 may have been unaware of the late minister's participation, yet another gentleman of more recent note was also excluded. In 1821, Samuel Postlethwaite had donated the land and money which had made possible the establishment of an asylum in Natchez. While the Female Charitable Society of New Orleans had named their asylum after their great patron, Julien Poydras, Postlethwaite received no similar honor nor was he remembered in the little history compiled by the present officers. The asylum officers also neglect some of their own accomplishments in the 1828 report. Providing complete care for orphans is portrayed as the Society's original intention, not education. Nowhere is the Lancastrian Academy mentioned or the five-year struggle to launch a permanent residence. Instead the story has been distilled to one simple theme: children were in need, and the ladies formed a charity to help them.

The tale stuck. Nearly a hundred and fifty years and several generations of benevolent women later, one of the officers recounted the establishment's history as she knew it: "Back then, there were no social programs to do anything for people…There were a lot of little children who needed attention and the women in the sewing circle

[2] From Daniel Smith's letter the Presbyterian Board of Missions, dated June 9, 1816 and printed in *Religious Remembrancer* 51(August 16, 1817): 201.
[3] An obituary for Daniel Smith was printed in the *Mississippi Republican*, March 20, 1823.

formed this little group."[4] Several years after that a local Natchez reporter gave her own version of the story: "The War of 1812 had left many widows and orphans, and with no place to go and no food to eat, the women of Natchez knew these children would die."[5] Though the facts had changed, the sense of urgency projected by the institution's founders could still be felt in these more recent explanations. The children of Mississippi were in danger, so purports local lore, and it was women—rather than men—who saved them.

If the ladies of Natchez had been initially reluctant to embark on an "enterprize of charity" in 1816, they soon lost all doubt and embraced the project with great vehemence. When the Female Charitable Society was formed, something was being done for Mississippi's poor and orphaned children, and had been for some time. A civil system of relief managed by county officials served to assist indigent minors, but viewed through the lens of evangelicalism that system no longer seemed adequate. Indeed, to benevolent women and their supporters, it seemed dangerous. A patriarchal structure whereby young boys and girls were bound out as young laborers and placed under the nearly absolute authority of individual masters and mistresses could not ensure a proper upbringing. By gathering the children under female governance, they would more likely learn moral and religious principles as well as rudimentary education—in short, all that mothers were becoming responsible for giving to their own sons and daughters.

[4] Quoted from Louise Geisenberger, president of the board of directors of the then-called Natchez Protestant Home. Susan Willey, "Home is 168 Years Old," *Natchez Democrat*, September 23, 1984.
[5] Kelly Beasley, "Children's Home Celebrates 180 Years," *Natchez Democrat*, April 23, 1995

"Rescuing some youthful minds from ignorance and vice" proved more challenging to benevolent women than they had originally surmised. Protecting the bodies and shaping the behavior of poor children could not be accomplished through charity schooling alone, so the Female Charitable Society changed its course and advocated the establishment of a civic household as a more efficient and effective means of achieving the initial objective. The women who managed this household and wrested jurisdiction over young white minors from county officials grounded their authority in civic motherhood. And motherhood became the prevailing policy for child welfare in the United States.

Hopes that the orphan asylum would eventually outlive its usefulness were never realized. Family fracturing and dysfunction never ceased and the civic household remained a fixture in Natchez, though its story has altered over the years to meet changing standards. The building constructed by the Society in 1822 was abandoned by the 1850s, and the charity children were moved to the grand residence of the late Samuel and Ann Postlethwaite. It was not until the 1950s that a new edifice was constructed, the one that still stands today, next to site of the old Postlethwaite home. In addition to physical structures, the name has also undergone various changes. After being called the (Female) Orphan Asylum, it became the Protestant Orphan Asylum in order to distinguish it from a recently founded Catholic institution. Later on, the word "asylum" was dropped from the title, having lost its positive connotations and conjuring instead a more sinister image. By 1960, the Protestant Orphanage had become the Protestant Home and then the Natchez Children's Home, as the Catholic facility closed and

managers wished to project greater inclusivity.[6] Though the number of boys and girls has been roughly the same since the beginning, the institution has for several decades assisted children of color as well. Since I began this dissertation the name has changed once again—to Natchez Children's Home Services—in order to show that more than residential care is offered. One of the new services is a program whereby families on the brink of state intervention can receive counseling and repair their fracture before children are confiscated.

Despite all these changes, some stories continue to linger about the place. The present director of Natchez Children's Home Services (a woman, though no longer called "directress") is often asked about the "orphans." Were their parents killed in a terrible accident? Did they die of illness, leaving their offspring all alone in the world? Some visitors to the present establishment express disappointment at not encountering the wide-eyed, parentless waifs they had been expecting to find. Echoes of portrayals made by the first generation of benevolent women about charity children continue to inform notions about residential care. That form of care has repeatedly come under attack in the same way that the Female Charitable Society denounced the existing civil system of relief. As the example of Natchez shows, questioning the present policy of child welfare is a natural and necessary part of societal evolution. Better questions will be asked as we understand how and why that policy took root.

[6] Thanks to Nancy Hungerford, director of Natchez Children's Home Services, for providing me this background information about the various institutional changes since the late nineteenth century.

Appendix

Chapter 36 of the Mississippi Territorial Code, 1799

"A Law directing the mode of binding apprentices"

The overseers of the poor for the several Townships, where there are orphan children chargeable to the county, or likely to become so; shall apply to the Court of Quarter sessions, held for the county, in which such poor children reside, to grant an order for such overseers, to bind the children as apprentices, to any reputable and discreet person, who may be willing to take them: the male children until they arrive at the age of twenty one years, and the female children until they arrive at the age of eighteen years; and the person to whom an apprentice shall be bound, shall engage by a covenant to be entered in the Indenture, to provide the apprentice with a sufficiency of good and wholesome provisions, necessary cloathing, washing and lodging, teach the said apprentice the business or occupation, which he pursues for a livelihood, and also to read, write, and cipher as far as the rule of three; and at the expiration of the apprenticeship, to furnish the said apprentice with one complete new suit of cloathing, and two shirts; if female, one complete new suit of cloaths and two shifts.

It shall be lawful for the Court of Quarter sessions, upon the complaint of the overseers of the poor, or of any apprentice, by themselves or friends, against their masters or mistresses, to hear and determine; and if it shall appear to the satisfaction of the court, that such complaint be well founded, and of sufficient magnitude to make removal necessary; the court shall have power to remove such apprentice, and bind him, or her, to such other person as they think proper.

(Reprinted in P.L. Rainwater, "Sargent's Code," *The American Journal of Legal History* 11 (July 1967): 312-13.)

Select Bibliography

Abbreviations

ACCC Adams County Chancery Court, Natchez, Mississippi

HNF Historic Natchez Foundation, Natchez, Mississippi

HTML Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University

MDAH Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi

NCHR Natchez Children's Home Records, 1816-1945, 1990, Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin

NTC Natchez Trace Collection, Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin

Archival Sources

Adams County Chancery Court, Natchez, Mississippi
- Deed Record Books A-LL
- Inventory Record Book I
- Orphan's Court Minutebook I (April 1803 to January 1815)
- Orphan's Court Minutebook II (February 1815 and January 1820)
- Orphan's Court Minutebook III (February 1820 to 1824)

Historic Natchez Foundation, Natchez, Mississippi

Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
- George Washington Papers, Series 2, Reel 51

Louisiana State University, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Baton Rouge, Louisiana
- Ellis-Farar Papers

Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi
- First Presbyterian Church (Natchez) Record Book
- Natchez Historical Society Collection
  - Auditor's Records

Natchez Municipal Records, Series 2051, Volume 17
Pine Ridge (Presbyterian) Church Records

Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana
Howard-Tilton Memorial Library
Poydras Home Collection
Administrative Papers (1816-1839)
Minutebook I (January 1817 to January 1823)
Minutebook II (January 1823 to May 1832)

The University of Texas at Austin, Center for American History, Austin, Texas
Natchez Children's Home Records, 1816-1945, 1990
Natchez Trace Collection
Burling Family Papers, 1810-1827
Provincial and Territorial Documents, 1759-1813

Newspapers

Natchez
The Ariel
Green's Impartial Observer
Mississippi Republican
Mississippi State Gazette
Mississippi Statesman and Gazette
Natchez Democrat
Natchez Gazette
Washington Republican and Natchez Intelligencer

Periodicals

Boston Recorder
The Christian Monitor and Religious Intelligencer
Connecticut Evangelical Magazine and Religious Intelligencer
The Massachusetts Magazine, or Monthly Museum
The New York Magazine, or Literary Repository
The Panoplist, and Missionary Herald
Philadelphia Journal of the Medical and Physical Sciences
The Philadelphia Minerva, Containing a Variety of Fugitive Pieces in Prose
The Port-Folio
The Religious Intelligencer

Religious Remembrancer
The Theatrical Censor
The Weekly Recorder… Chillicothe

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